The CAMP FIRE GIRLS

at Pine-Tree Camp

Camp Fire Girls Series

The Camp Fire Girls at Pine-Tree Camp

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"It's the worst example of pure and unadulterated nerve I've ever heard of," cried Jane Pellew inelegantly.

The Camp Fire Girls
at Pine-Tree Camp

BY

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Captain Becky's Winter Cruise
Captain Becky's Masquerade

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The Reilly & Lee Co.
Chicago

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CHAPTER I

THE TWO SISTERS

Edna Holmes glanced helplessly around her luxurious room, littered with clothes and fashionable trifles, and thence to her sister's sympathetic face.

"Ida!" she exclaimed, a pucker of discontent spoiling her pretty mouth, "I — I'm simply bored to death. I'm so bored I could cry! Why on earth must I straighten out this terrible room when the house is full of servants? I — I simply can not dig my way through that pile of clothes."

"Grandfather — " began Ida.

"Grandfather!" sniffed Edna. "Grandfather said I had to! Don't I know it? It isn't necessary to remind me of that, Ida Holmes. Every unpleasant thing I've had to do since I came home from school, grandfather thought up. Oh, dear,

oh, dear! I don't see why stockings always straggle apart when you lay them down. No matter how carefully I put two together at night, I'm sure to find that one of them has wriggled somewhere else in the morning."

"Grandfather," ventured Ida uncertainly, "grandfather says you keep such disorderly heaps of things around that — that when you want to find anything in a hurry you have to dig and dig and fling stuff about and — and that makes the disorder of the room all the worse — "

"Ida!" exclaimed Edna indignantly, "don't you dare quote grandfather to me again. Ever since grandfather came to live with us, he's scolded dreadfully. And always about you and me, Ida. You know it's true."

"But — Edna," reminded the younger girl gently, "he only scolds because he's old-fashioned and likes girls to be — well — different from what we are. He says neither of us have any sense of responsibility."

Edna yawned ungraciously.

"I wish he'd staid abroad," she declared, "instead of coming home suddenly to live with us — and scold."

"But, Edna," protested Ida, "he's been abroad so long just — just traveling about — and he's lonely and alone. You wouldn't like it yourself, I'm sure."

Edna shrugged.

"And I *am* responsible," she flashed. "I plan all my own clothes. I think that's rather clever. Nobody has half so many or so beautiful things as I do. Every girl at school envies me. You know it, Ida."

"You're very pretty, too," said Ida wistfully.

Edna flung back her shoulders and accepted the generous compliment as her just due, with the arrogance of a young queen. Yet glancing into Ida's fair, flushed face, with its deep blue eyes, one saw something gentler, something prettier in a quiet way, that involuntarily warmed the heartstrings. Edna's blue eyes were the flashing kind alive with fire; Ida's were softer, like water when the sun is on it. Edna's lips had an arrogant twist and they were vividly scarlet; Ida's had a wistfulness that made them droop and quiver easily. Still, for all these points of difference — and the difference was more of temperament than of color and contour — there was a strong resemblance. The coloring of

the two girls was identical — soft, fair hair with a lustrous hint of bronze in it like that of the pretty mother who had died back in their early childhood; deep blue eyes and fresh, rosy, flower-like faces.

Edna glanced again at the extreme disorder of the room and sighed.

"When you come home from school with trunks and trunks," she said, "you're simply bound to litter your room up a bit. Every other time Lisette has done wonderful things clearing it away. If — if grandfather hadn't been here and happened to glance into my room just after I'd begun to unpack — "

She flung a pair of shoes into a corner with a vicious bang.

"That's how I feel, Ida Holmes!" she exclaimed defiantly. "Have you straightened out your room yet?"

"Yes," said Ida. It was typical of her instinctive delicacy that she did not describe how quietly and neatly she had put her things away after her grandfather's vigorous comment on the day of their arrival.

Edna frowned.

"Well," she said, "you're mighty lucky to have it all done. I loathe hanging up clothes. At school May Hollins always does it for me while I read poetry to her. She's mad about poetry. I can't for the life of me see why grandfather must lecture so about our being spoiled," she added petulantly. "We're anything but that. Where's the candy you hid, Ida, when he found us eating it before lunch and scolded so?"

"Under the bed," said Ida. "I'll get it, Edna."

With a graceful twist of her lithe, slim body she wriggled under the bed and lay flat, giggling and breathless.

"Edna," she called in muffled tones, "your lace collar's under here — "

"Great Scott!" said Edna appalled, "and it's real lace too. I remember father read me a terrible lecture about extravagance when I bought it, and Miss Evans refused to let me wear it in class because she believes in simpler things until you're around forty. Pitch it out, Ida."

"And your comb — the one June Tuttle gave you last year for your birthday. It's in here too — if I can reach it."

"Caesar's ghost! See if my other silk stocking's there too."

"Yes," said Ida. "It's caught in the hook on your silk petticoat and that's here too. And here's the candy." She wriggled forth again, flushed and merry. Edna pounced upon the box of candy and fingered the bonbons with slender, discriminating fingers.

"Ida," she began, "I can't possibly take up any heavy exertion like clothes-sorting unless I fortify myself with the moral support of a chocolate."

She flung herself languidly upon a couch by the window and waved the box aloft.

"Here's death to order and fussing!" she began tragically and set the box down on the sill with a startled thud.

"Lisette," she exclaimed sharply to the prim, middle-aged servant who had noiselessly entered the room in the midst of her harangue, "I hate the way you glide into a room without knocking. Ida and I are no longer children. What do you want?"

Lisette glanced doubtfully at her apron. She was a little hurt at the careless insolence in Edna's

voice but the downward droop of her eyelids veiled the usual devotion which Edna always claimed and won.

" Your grandfather, Miss Edna, wants to know if you cleaned up your room and put your school things away? "

Edna flung the box of chocolates from the window sill to the bed, where they scattered over the snowy spread; rising, she began to fold up her clothes with angry celerity. Ida, with an instinctive desire to help, busily straightened the silver on the bureau and looked depressed as she always did when things were going wrong with Edna.

" Tell him Edna's doing it splendidly now, Lisette," she pleaded. " We'll have it done in no time."

" Tell him," flared Edna, " that orders to me ought to come straight to me from my father and not from him! Tell him " — her voice broke in an indignant sob.

" Hush, oh, please do hush, Edna! " begged Ida tearfully. " He'll hear you. And he's so fond of us and he's awfully proud of you, Edna. He thinks you're so pretty and so clever. He means it for the best — really he does. He told father

he wants to make fine, big, splendid womanly women of us and father did give him complete authority — ''

Edna wheeled furiously.

'' Just because father's so busy making money that he doesn't want to trouble himself with bringing up his daughters,'' she said, '' is no reason why we must answer to — to an unreasonable old man who thinks women were only made to — to cook and sweep and sew — ''

'' Edna! '' cried Ida, horrified. '' You mustn't speak so of grandfather! He's a dear, good old man — and it isn't respectful.''

Edna stamped her foot.

'' Ida Holmes,'' she commanded imperiously, '' stop staring at me in that horrified manner this instant! I know I'm in a temper and I don't care.'' She burst suddenly into a passion of tears and flung herself face downward on the couch.

Ida, whose tears were never very far away, cried silently into her handkerchief.

Lisette glanced helplessly around the room and touched Edna on the shoulder.

'' Miss Edna,'' she whispered, '' I'll tiptoe

about and fold up your things. He won't know. You lie still, dearie. You're tired out."

So Lisette began her noiseless task of putting the room of her favorite in order while Edna lay sullenly on the couch and watched, a somber triumph in her eyes. Ida merely cried some more, partly because Ida's tears and blushes came much too easily, and partly because she had a vague and uncomfortable conviction that Edna was disobeying.

All of them, however, were too intent upon the surreptitious business in hand to hear a step upon the stair or the opening of Edna's door. Nor did they see the hale, rosy, determined old gentleman in the doorway until a voice in which there was a frank ring of authority brought them all to electric realization.

"Grandfather!" squealed Ida, her face scarlet with confusion and guilt, for she was deftly folding up a skirt of Edna's — but Edna sprang indignantly to her feet and stood trembling with nervous anger.

"Ida," said Grandfather Holmes, "give the skirt to Edna, please, and let her fold it. I told

you not to help her. Lisette, you may go. You have done exactly what I forbade."

He glanced keenly at Edna.

"My dear," he said, "I'll sit over here by the window this time until your room is quite done."

He did. Edna, whose flashing eyes had betokened a mute rebellion, sullenly betook herself to her task. Despite the resentment in her eyes she dared not voice her discontent, for there was some latent suggestion of power and dignity in the handsome, rugged old man before her that made her hold her tongue and bite her lips in an agony of vexation and annoyance.

Ida, her smooth, fair cheeks reddening and paling alternately, stood helplessly by on the verge of tears.

So by the window Grandfather Holmes smoked a placid pipe and stroked his beard, but his keen eyes missed nothing. Indeed they rarely did.

Now it was most astonishing, in view of Edna's previous languor, how quickly her littered room righted itself. A furious energy guided her hands and feet and presently she stood before her grandfather with scarlet cheeks and curling lip.

The old man sighed.

It was hard to understand this proud, spoiled child of his son's. Ida was different. To be sure, Ida too had many faults but they were pettier faults than Edna's and the faults of undue meekness. Moreover, Ida at most times was tractable and respectful, but then she was younger. Two years more of undisciplined freedom might easily make of her what Edna had become, a frivolous, fashionable, money-spoiled child with tastes far beyond her years, a pampered, discontented youngster far too grown up to suit her grandfather's old-fashioned tastes.

"Edna," said her grandfather, "I've often noticed that when you make up your mind to do a thing, you do it better and quicker than most." He held out his hand, which Edna ignored. "Come, come," he said kindly; "let's not quarrel, my dear. Get your coat and hat and I'll take you and Ida motoring. It's a glorious day — almost summer."

"Thank you," said Edna stiffly. "I — I hardly think I care to go."

Ida shyly put forth her hand and touched her grandfather's shoulder.

"I'll go," she said and the old man beamed.

"Bless your heart, dear," he said warmly, "of course you will. Come, now, I'll get Jasper to bring the car around while you get your things."

Ida scurried off with a glance of keen regret at her sister. It hurt her to have Edna unhappy; it hurt even more to leave her behind.

Presently the big car was chugging noisily outside and Ida, hurrying breathlessly down the stairs, ran straight into Lisette.

"Dear me, Miss Ida!" said Lisette, "you've knocked the wind clean out of me and that's a fact. Miss Edna sent me to say she's goin' after all."

Ida went flying to the waiting car in keen delight.

"She'll come," she announced radiantly. "Oh, Grandfather, I *am* glad!"

"Why, so am I!" exclaimed Grandfather Holmes, stroking his beard. "It's a proof that Edna is much more forbearing and forgiving, after all, than I dared hope."

But there was no particular warmth in Edna's face as she swept haughtily out to the waiting car and took her place in the tonneau.

"I really wouldn't have gone," she said carelessly to her sister, "but I had this perfectly stun-

ning new motor bonnet and I was simply crazy to wear it."

The engine of the great car whirred. Grandfather Holmes looked a little grave. Then he glanced at Ida's wistful little face, fair and rosy in the bright spring light.

"Tell me, dear," he said gently, "why *you* went. You're timid and afraid of motors and you don't often go — "

"I know," whispered Ida, "but you looked so disappointed when Edna said no and — I — I did so want to please you."

Edna did not hear. She was beaming radiantly at a fashionable group of girls on the sidewalk and her bow was sufficiently elaborate to show off her bonnet.

CHAPTER II

A TEA-PARTY

There was a clatter of spoons and cups in Edna's room.

"Ida," said Edna, "you pour the tea, to-day. It's getting awfully warm and I don't feel like it."

Ellen Birch, curled up in a chair by the window, fluffed her hair, arched her brows and glanced significantly at Ida.

"Don't do it, mousie!" she said pertly. "It's just as warm work for you as it is for her. And, besides, you humor her too much. Everybody does."

Edna glanced carelessly at her impertinent guest, whose acrid remarks were much too frequent to excite comment, and shrugged.

"Mabel Wing," went on Ellen severely, glancing at a sleepy, good-natured looking girl stretched out full length on the couch, "you're getting fatter and lazier by the minute and you can't deny it. You've gained three pounds since I looked at you last. Get up and give me that couch."

Mabel flushed a little and lay still. Though there were times when she good-humoredly made critical reference to her own size, Ellen's cutting remarks often ruffled her.

"Go on and pour the tea, mousie," Mabel advised lazily. "It's got to be done and what's it matter who does it? And not too much lemon for Ellen. Acid isn't good for her."

Ida, blushing because all eyes were upon her, poured the tea and carried it around to the others.

"Hum!" grumbled Ellen Birch, sniffing the fragrant steam. "Wish I had a sister who'd do just as I pleased whenever I told her. I'd tell her often."

"Oh, do keep quiet, Ellen," put in Mabel Wing tranquilly. "Some day you'll say something so sharp it'll cut off your tongue."

Ellen flashed her an unfriendly glance and stirred her tea. She was a brown-faced girl with small, keen eyes and sharp features. In the little fashionable clique of Edna's friends, the girls all feared her. She was kind only to Ida.

"Where are you going this summer, Edna?" she queried presently, dabbling at a bit of lemon

in her cup. "I want awfully to go somewhere — different — "

"Newport perhaps," yawned Edna with a practised grown-up air of languor. "I've some beautiful new clothes all ready if I do go. Do let me show them to you."

She began pulling out bureau drawers and exhibiting a wealth of shimmering, cobwebby things that made Ellen Birch's ferret eyes snap with envy. Ellen was jealous of Edna's excellent taste in clothes. Her own were rarely tasteful or becoming. She lacked the quick, clever touch, the twist of a bow, the stylish originality of design that made Edna's clothes a topic of discussion among her friends.

"Wonder how I'd look in that thing," said Mabel Wing, dropping three lumps of sugar into her tea, "that skirt with the flounce around the hips. It would probably make me look exactly like a top — "

"It would," agreed Ellen Birch instantly and Ida, flushing, tactfully turned the subject.

"Why do you take three lumps of sugar in your tea, Mabel? " she begged timidly. "It's awfully fattening. I heard the doctor say so."

"So did I," nodded Mabel lugubriously. "And he says it to me too every time I see him. Is that a real box of candy under the bed there, Edna, or isn't it?"

"Yes," said Edna indifferently, "it is. Pull it out and help yourself."

With a lazy groan Mabel reached for it with her foot, found it out of reach and asked Ellen Birch to pass it.

"Get it yourself," retorted Ellen. "The exercise will do you good."

"Cat!" snapped Mabel Wing, but with rare good humor, and rising, she reached for the candy and helped herself.

Now there were pleasant moments when a semblance of good-fellowship prevailed in this little clique of Edna's friends, chiefly, be it said, through Mabel Wing's unfailing good humor and Ida's timid sweetness, but alas! it was marred only too often by flashes of petty jealousy and spite and Ellen Birch's sharp tongue had often spurred a covert rivalry into an open quarrel.

"I do wish father would let me go abroad on Mrs. Ridder's yacht," sighed Edna discontentedly. "I'd have a perfectly wonderful time, I

know. Nearly everybody's grown up that's going — ''

'' There'd be one who wasn't,'' murmured Ellen Birch, aiming a dart at one of Edna's most conspicuous weaknesses, '' if you went.''

'' Edna,'' cried Ida loyally, '' is the most grown-up looking not-grown-up I ever saw. She looks twenty and she's only seventeen, aren't you, Edna? ''

'' Hear! Hear! '' boomed Mabel Wing applauding. '' The little pigeon bristles! ''

Edna shrugged. She glanced at Ellen Birch, however, with a curious disdain, and drew her tall, slender figure to its full height, dwarfing the dark, keen-faced little spitfire beside her.

'' The human pine-tree! '' said Ellen sharply. '' Stretch some more, Edna. I like to see it.''

There was a general laugh at this and a little more genuine good humor; then Mabel Wing gulped the remains of a chocolate and glanced panic-stricken at the box.

'' Great guns, Edna,'' she exclaimed contritely; '' I'm sorry. I've eaten everything in sight. You know, I've simply got to learn to eat a piece of

candy and then glance in the box between times. Otherwise something always happens.''

'' Just the way you ate up all June Tuttle's marshmallows! '' accused Ellen. '' And then you pretended you didn't know they were gone. It's a convenient habit.''

Mabel Wing heaved a box at her head and collapsed on the sofa with a tired groan.

'' It's much too warm for early summer,'' she complained. '' If my father doesn't send me away pretty soon, it will be good-bye Mabel. Isn't May Hollins coming this afternoon? ''

'' I asked her to come,'' said Edna, '' but she declared it was entirely too warm to drink tea.''

'' Telephone, Miss Edna,'' came Lisette's voice at the door.

'' That's likely May now,'' said Edna. She scurried off to answer the call and presently her voice came clearly to them through the corridor.

'' Hello,'' she said. '' Oh, it's you, is it, Marion Ralston? . . . I thought likely it was May. . . . May Hollins. . . . What? . . . Oh, dear, what is it? . . . I'm dying to hear. . . . Can't you come over? . . . Yes.

Ellen and Mabel and Ida and I are drinking tea in my room, but it's terribly hot. . . . Do come along and tell us — " She hung up and ran back through the hall.

" Marion Ralston has something to tell us! " she announced breathlessly. " I can't imagine what it can be. She was awfully mysterious — "

" Probably," said Ellen shrewdly, " she's got a lot of new clothes. She doesn't talk of much else." There was a glint of malice in her keen eyes, for Marion Ralston and Edna Holmes shared, in a perpetual spirit of rivalry, the sovereignty of this little group of girls.

" Likely," flashed Edna, " you'd say the same of me."

" Likely," admitted Ellen frankly, " I would. And likely it would be true too."

A motorcar presently whirred up to the driveway and Marion, alighting, waved to the girls in the window. She came breathlessly up the stairs, a dark, vivid, handsome girl with clothes too brightly daring for her age.

" What is it, Marion? " squealed the four girls in unison. " What is there to tell? And who's it about? Don't keep us in suspense."

"Not a single word," said Marion maliciously, "until I've had a cup of tea. And, besides, after you've heard the fatal news, you won't be so pleased. A little hot water, please, Ida, one lump of sugar and a slice of lemon. Who had candy?"

"Mabel Wing," volunteered Ellen significantly. "Nobody else."

Marion laughed and accepted the dainty cup of tea with graceful fingers.

"It's awfully nice tea, mousie, dear," said Marion, smiling at Ida's timid air of hospitality, "but it's too hot for tea and that's a fact."

"Did I know it was going to clear and get so warm?" demanded Edna fretfully. "It was really nice and cool this morning. Shall I ring for some iced lemonade?"

Now Edna was so anxious to hear the news that Marion was mischievously withholding, that her offer was in reality impelled more by civility than inclination and therefore the general outburst of assent was somewhat unwelcome.

"A brilliant suggestion!" exclaimed Marion Ralston, setting down her teacup.

Mabel Wing actually sat up.

"A glass of lemonade," she said, "is, next to getting thin, the one thing I crave."

"I'll ring, Edna," said Ida and characteristically took upon herself the wants of Edna's guests.

When the iced lemonade was at length upon the table there was a general sigh of relief. Mabel Wing tucked her feet up beneath her and closed her eyes in ecstasy while she drank. Marion Ralston, watching the impatient furrow in Edna's forehead, sipped her lemonade with tantalizing slowness.

"Where," she said at last with suspicious demureness, "where are you going to spend your summer, Edna?"

"On Mrs. Ridder's yacht, perhaps," shrugged Edna nonchalantly. "Possibly at Newport. I really can't say. I have my clothes all ready for either place. I'm really bored to death at the prospect of anything else."

"You're always bored," said Ellen Birch sniffing. "I think it's because you're so frightfully grown up."

Edna ignored the thrust.

"You must really see all the wonderful things I have, Marion," murmured Edna. "Why, I've

simply spent weeks and weeks planning them."

Marion threw back her head and laughed immoderately.

"Maybe you won't need them," she ventured demurely.

Edna flushed indignantly.

"I'd like to know why not," she said impetuously. "And I'm sure I can't see anything so very humorous in my having — clothes."

"You never do see anything very humorous," chirped the irrepressible little ferret by the window, "and it's all because you take yourself so seriously."

This time Ellen's thrust went home. Edna's eyes filled slowly with tears of vexation and anger.

"Ellen Birch," she said, "I — I don't see why you always say such unpleasant things. I don't take myself seriously. You always spoil every afternoon the girls have together just — just by stirring somebody up and — and then there's a quarrel and once grandfather heard you and he said he never saw girls with less comradeship of spirit and that we didn't know anything at all about team work, and a lot of other horrid things just on account of you!"

Edna indignantly wiped her tears away and poured herself some more tea.

"Have the grace to look ashamed there, Ellen Birch," exclaimed Mabel Wing solemnly. "Edna's dead right. Marion, what is this terrible secret that's glued so fast to your mind you can't get it off?"

But once again Marion chuckled so tantalizingly that the others glanced at her in frank disapproval. Plainly she knew something of interest to them all and of conspicuous interest to Edna.

"Do show me your clothes, Edna!" she purred. "I'm crazy to see them."

"No," said Edna coldly, "the clothes can wait." For there was something about Marion Ralston's air that suggested an element of humor in the display.

"Oh, come, Marion," put in Ida timidly. "Do please tell us the secret. Dear me, I'm anxious too."

Marion's eyes softened wonderfully as the eyes of most people did when they rested on Ida.

"Dear little mousie," she said gently, "I'll tell you, of course, and this very minute." Laughingly she ignored the beseeching look of the others

and leaning over whispered earnestly in Ida's soft, pink ear.

"Oh dear!" cried Ida tragically. "Oh — oh, dear! Marion, it — it simply can't be true."

"I won't stand it!" exploded Mabel Wing in a sudden spasm of desperation and energy. "I certainly will not. Marion Ralston, it's not only bad manners to whisper — but in this case it's positive torture." With a gigantic effort and a somewhat hysterical giggle, Mabel propelled a cushion across the room and disarranged Marion's hat. Then she tried to glare, but her round blue eyes looked so ludicrous bulging forth above her fat pink cheeks that a roar of laughter went up and once more there was a semblance of good-fellowship in Edna's room.

"Why," said Marion good-humoredly, "the whole truth of the matter is, Edna, that you're not going to get a chance to go to Newport or to Europe in Mrs. Ridder's yacht. Your father and mine have been hatching up some scheme and they're going to send us off camping in the wilds for the whole summer. Think of it!"

"Camping!" exclaimed Edna aghast. "It — it can't be. Why — I — I simply loathe it."

"So do I," agreed Marion, "but I'm quite sure of the facts. I had the whole thing from mother this morning. She let something slip at breakfast and I didn't rest until I had the whole story. Father says that summers ought not be frivolous — that they ought to be the time for young girls to recuperate for winter study — "

There were tears of genuine mortification and disappointment in Edna's blue eyes.

"I — I won't go," she said in tremulous tones. "I — I certainly will not. It's outrageous to expect us to give up our summer and — and all our clothes — "

"Glad I don't have to go," sang out Mabel Wing jubilantly. "There's always a tremendous amount of foolish labor in a camp and I'd surely die. Work makes me feel sick all over." She glanced suddenly at Edna's ruffled hair from which a loosened comb depended.

"There was a young lady named Holmes," she improvised melodramatically,

"Who was losing one of her combs,

"'I'm so rattled!' she said,

"'That I wish I was dead — ' Help! What rhymes with combs? "

"Bones!" suggested Ellen Birch. "And you haven't any."

"You've nothing else!" retorted Mabel indignantly. "I'm glad I don't have to go camping," she added. "It's no sport for little Mabel. Bugs in your soup — up with the first chickadee in the treetop — Ugh!"

Marion Ralston listened with keen enjoyment. Then she shot her final bolt.

"Huh!" she said. "Your father's in the scheme too. And you have to go!"

"Merciful cream-puffs!" exclaimed Mabel, reverting in horror to a favorite expletive. "You can't — you don't mean it!" And Ellen Birch in a spasm of elfish enjoyment fell to waltzing madly about the room. There was a general buzz of laughter.

Mabel mopped her round pink face despairingly.

"Tell us more," she said. "I'm absolutely kerflummaxed."

"There isn't much more," said Marion. "I quarreled dreadfully with mother because," with a direct glance at Edna, "I had some clothes too and wanted to go somewhere to show them and mother said I had to go camping whether or no;

that all the arrangements had been made. The edict reads that Edna and Ida Holmes, Ellen Birch, Mabel Wing, May Hollins, June Tuttle and Marion Ralston will rusticate in some remote woods for the summer and recuperate for winter study!"

"I—I think it's perfectly terrible!" said Edna, bright tears of anger in her pretty eyes. "I don't need any rest in the woods. I—I need some real pleasure after grinding all winter at the Academy—"

"Show me your clothes, Edna," suggested Marion Ralston sweetly.

"I won't," said Edna flatly. "What's more, I'm not going to waste them. If I have to go off to a horrid camp I'll take them with me."

"I think perhaps I'll do that, too," said Marion jealously.

"I won't mind going," laughed Ellen Birch, "just to see you all doing something you don't want to do."

"And I won't so much mind going," said Ida shyly, "for I love the woods."

"Merciful cream-puffs!" repeated Mabel Wing. "I'll never live through the summer."

CHAPTER III

THE CAMP IN THE HILLS

The hills had been growing steadily higher since the train puffed heavily around the bend in the valley. From the windows of the Pullman one caught great irregular blurs of bluish mist limned against the sky like hills of smoke.

"We must be very nearly there," said Ida Holmes, her soft, pretty eyes lingering wistfully on the hills. "Oh, Edna, dear, I do wish you thought it all as beautiful as I do."

"Well," said Ellen Birch sharply, "she doesn't, mousie, and there's an end to it."

Marion Ralston glanced at Edna with significant eyes and shrugged. Ellen caught the look and pounced cat-like upon the two.

"Oh, we all know you and Edna are perfectly disgusted," she said. "But you might as well make the best of it. And the hills are beautiful, mousie. Lots of people would like them ever so much better than — clothes."

"Looks terribly healthy up here," grumbled

Mabel Wing lugubriously. "Likely I'll get a lot fatter. I really need the heat of the tropics to melt off my weight more than I need those cool-looking hills." Her fat, pink face lengthened. "My, won't they be hard to climb!"

"For you — very likely," put in Ellen Birch tartly. "I'll wager, however, that I can scramble up without once losing my breath."

"When is June Tuttle coming to the camp?" asked Marion Ralston.

"In a week or so," ventured Ida. "She's at a house-party."

Mrs. Rader, Marion Ralston's aunt, who was chaperoning the party, closed her magazine.

"One more station, girls," she said. "I'm to see you safely off the train and into the stage. There! You can see from here the road that winds up toward the lake."

There was a general gathering up of candy boxes, magazines and trifling luggage. Then the train wheezed noisily into a little station, the conductor shouted an unintelligible name and Mrs. Rader and the girls alighted.

It was a sleepy little town bathed in the white sunlight of a June day. Off to the west a steep,

dust-white road wound slowly upward. A broad creek flowed musically under a bridge by the side of a country hotel. Truly an uninspiring spot to the eyes of Marion and Edna, whose faces plainly reflected an intense dismay.

"It — it's really a great deal worse than I thought," whispered Edna tragically. "I — I did hope the village might be possible, but it isn't. Oh, Marion, I don't see how I'm going to live the summer out!"

"Nor I," said Marion.

A great wagon rattled swiftly down the hill-road and pulled up at the station. The driver touched his hat to Mrs. Rader.

"Miss Fielding sent me down for the young ladies, ma'am," he said respectfully. "And she likewise begged me to bring you up to the camp for one night at least."

"I'm sorry," said Mrs. Rader, "but my train goes out from here in just ten minutes. It's awfully kind of her to invite me." She motioned to the girls, standing in a little dejected group some distance away.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "*don't* look so glum! Your ride up to the lake ought to be real

fun! See, Miss Fielding has sent a great wagon filled with hay. It will be lots more fun for you than the stage. Why, when I was a girl I should have called this a real lark." She kissed each girl affectionately and glanced searchingly at her niece's pretty, bored face. "Better make the best of things, Marion," she advised cheerfully. "It's the only way. And I'm sure you'll like Miss Fielding. She's a dear, sweet girl just a year out of college."

Ida Holmes was the first to climb into the great wagonload of hay, and her shy little face fairly glowed with delight. Edna followed fastidiously with a stare of disgust. Ellen scrambled aboard with a characteristic remark and then amid a storm of cheers Mabel Wing climbed in, groaning.

"Likely," she said, "this wagon will drop to pieces any minute, now that I'm in it. Once in Naples a rattle-trap wagon did fall to pieces when I got in with father and I've never really gotten over the shock. You know father isn't slim."

With much breathless laughter — for even Edna and Marion, fastidious "grown ups" as they were, could not resist this good-humored scramble among the soft, dry hay — they finally

made themselves comfortable and watched Mrs. Rader's train pull in. They waved and called a merry good-bye to her as she climbed aboard; then the branch-train puffed slowly away to the north and the driver cracked his whip above the backs of his horses.

How warm and dry it was! The flowers of early summer were peeping radiantly forth by the wayside and the world was green. Up — up — up climbed the hay-wagon with its freight of girls, winding around curves where now and then one glimpsed a farmhouse, and then on. Hills to the north and south; hills to the east and west! It was a soft, fair world of hills and flowers.

Ida's face glowed; but for all the beauty of the summer world, Edna's face did not lose its pucker of discontent. She was thinking of Mrs. Ridder's yacht and of the fashionable folly of Newport. How could one wear beautiful clothes up here among the sand and flies, away from the world? There was no one to see — and envy! It was characteristic of Edna that she did not see the bees droning lazily in the sunshine or the purple of the never-ending hills. She saw only the things that bring discomfort.

There were times when the great wagon slid dangerously on a steep descent and the driver clucked encouragingly to his horses and applied his brakes, but more often they were climbing steadily upward into a world of hills.

Presently there was a bright flash of silver and the road skirted a lake, hemmed in by whispering birches. Across the lake through the trees glimmered the white of many tents.

"That's the camp!" said the driver, "and, young ladies, I ain't never seen a more comfortable, all-around spot to spend a summer in."

Slowly the great hay-wagon rumbled around a deeply-rutted lake road and halted among the trees. A tall girl with a fresh, sweet face emerged from one of the tents and came hurrying down a path to greet them. There was a wholesome rosiness and energy about her that made one think of the out-of-doors and a fresh west wind.

"I'm very glad to see all of you," she said warmly. "I'm Miss Fielding and I'm to take care of you all for the summer and teach you the real fun of a camp. . . . The trunks, Joe?"

"I'll bring 'em up in the morning, Miss Katherine," said Joe. "The young ladies has bags

enough with 'em to last overnight." He spoke briskly to his horses, cracked his whip and doffed his hat. The wagon creaked away.

Miss Fielding, smiling, led the way to camp.

It was a spot to win the heart of any nature lover. That it failed with this spoiled little band of girls hungering for artificial excitement was to be expected. There was a wonderful smell of pine in the forest; the ground was thick with leaves and pine needles; and the primary essentials of a good camp, good wood and good water were close at hand. The selection of the camping site had been made with care and foresight. A spring purled musically up over mossy stones between the camp and the lake.

Nora, the camp cook, stood, smiling, by the camp kitchen. Off to the left among the trees a lazy mare was placidly chewing hay under a snowy canopy.

"That," explained Miss Fielding pleasantly, "is Her Gentle Highness, Maude, the camp mare. She chews everything, chiefly her halter. Once or twice now Nora and I have had to scurry out in the early morning and find her. She has a fondness for the woods — and solitude."

Miss Fielding passed on to the nearest tent and lifted the flap. It contained but the barest essentials of comfort, scrupulously neat and clean.

"Two girls in a tent," she explained. "It's not so lonely. And the tents are very large. We're really very wonderfully equipped."

Her bright, keen eyes lingered on the crestfallen faces of Marion and Edna with sudden misgiving. How very hard it was to interest them! And how very polite and ceremonious they seemed — not at all like girls. Fashionable little women, thought Miss Fielding pityingly, bored to death! Only the shy little girl with the lovely eyes seemed honestly glad to be here. Miss Fielding glanced furtively at fat, luxury-loving Mabel Wing, who seemed slightly scandalized at the bareness of the tents and decidedly incredulous at the notion of the camp's being well-equipped. Then, her heart sinking momentarily, her glance strayed to Ellen Birch. Ellen's bright, dark eyes were snapping with a spiteful enjoyment and Katherine Fielding felt that she was reading the whole situation with unchild-like keenness.

What a summer lay ahead! Miss Fielding sighed.

"Suppose you get off your things now," she said suddenly with a resolute return to her bright, matter-of-fact way, "and run down to the lake and freshen up a bit. Then we'll all have supper. Nora has quite eclipsed herself to-night and we have quite a wonderful supper ahead. That's the tent dining room over there, girls, but to-night we're going to spread a long table out under the trees in celebration."

There was an instant of constraint — then as if the energy snapping electrically in her eyes must have a vent, Ellen Birch laughed elfishly and bounded into the nearest tent. She seemed impelled by a feverish energy of enjoyment as she flung off her hat and led the way on a run to the lake, but whether she was honestly looking forward with pleasurable excitement to a summer in the woods or whether she was actuated entirely by a spiteful enjoyment of the evident disgust of the others, Miss Fielding could not be sure. Ellen Birch was an enigma.

Ida Holmes bathed her flushed face and her hands in the cool lake with a child's genuine gurgle of delight. Mabel Wing climbed clumsily down to the water's edge and, in accordance with the

ways of Mabel, startled them all by nearly falling in. Marion Ralston and Edna Holmes sniffed and dabbled daintily in the water.

"You have to *splash!*" cut in Ellen Birch forcibly. "Don't dabble in a perfectly good lake as if it was so much violet water."

"See," whispered Ida suddenly, "the twilight's coming."

Softly it was creeping over the quiet lake and the moon was rising. Ida turned in the direction of camp and seized her sister's arm.

"Look!" she said. "Isn't it pretty!"

Chinese lanterns glowed among the trees like so many giant fireflies. Above the camp table, snowily visible in the dim twilight, hung a luminous string of lanterns stretched from tree to tree. There was an odor of coffee in the warm night air.

"It is pretty!" said Ellen Birch and Ida caught her sister's hand.

"Oh, Edna," she pleaded, "you must try to like it all. You can if you want to. And Miss Fielding has worked so hard to welcome us — "

The girls glanced furtively at each other and grew a little quiet and ashamed.

Through the trees came the mellow boom of the

camp gong summoning them all to supper. Mabel Wing led the charge on a run. She was always hungry.

Miss Fielding glanced anxiously at the pretty, lantern-lit faces of the girls clustering about her at supper.

"I do hope that you are all going to like it up here in these dear quiet woods and hills!" she exclaimed impulsively. "The forest can give us so much!"

There was silence; then Ida glanced shyly up into Miss Fielding's pretty face.

"I—I like it very much now," she said. "Indeed I do." Then with a hot flush: "And I like you so much, Miss Fielding!"

It was a little girl's impulsive frankness and it rang true. With a glow of tenderness in her eyes, Katherine Fielding bent and kissed Ida's cheek.

"Dear little girl," she said, glancing with a sigh at the indifferent faces of the others, "I am sure you are going to help me a very great deal, more than you dream!"

Edna heard and wondered carelessly just what she meant. She was to learn in time.

By ten the camp was quiet. Outside over the

lake a full moon was flooding silver over the rippling water. The girls were to sleep with the tent-sides up, for the night was as warm and peaceful as a night in Fairyland.

Off somewhere among the birches on the shadowy side of the lake, an owl hooted.

Edna shuddered. Ida sat up.

"What is it, Edna?" she whispered. "You — you aren't afraid?"

"It — it's so lonely," said Edna. "Oh, Ida — I — I hate it all so I could cry."

"Edna," said her little sister in great distress, "maybe — maybe it's because you won't let yourself like it. Now that we're here, why do you keep thinking of where you want to be when you can't be there?" But Edna had flung herself face downward on her pillow and was crying passionately.

Ida slipped noiselessly out of her own bed, a slim, white, comforting little ghost, and crept in with her sister.

"Edna," she begged, "don't cry. We have to stay. Father said so. And Miss Fielding is so sweet and lovely and so pretty too. I — I love her."

"There — there's only one bright side to it," said Edna with an indignant sob. "It — it takes me away from grandfather! Ida — I — I'm never going to speak to him again."

Ida's tears began to fall, as they always did when Edna was unhappy.

"You haven't spoken to him anyway," she ventured after a tearful interval, "ever since that day he made you clean your room. Oh, Edna, he's your grandfather — and father's father — and — and it isn't right — "

"It is! " flung back Edna passionately. "It's just as right as it is for him to meddle so. And — and I'm sure he planned the camp and made father send us — and I hate him for that too — "

"Hush! Hush! Oh, Edna, please," begged Ida, horrified at the bitterness and rancor in her sister's heart. "You — you sound so wicked."

With an impetuous little gesture she slid suddenly into Edna's arms and clung to her sobbing.

Presently the two fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV

A LETTER WRITTEN BY KATHERINE FIELDING TO A PERSON WHOSE IDENTITY MUST NOT BE DIVULGED BY THE AUTHOR

"The girls are here. What a shy, lovely little thing Ida is! I wanted to take her up in my arms and kiss her the minute I saw her — she is so demure and wistful — so utterly under Edna's thumb. It has been a sorry thing for her to have such a domineering sister of stronger will. Indeed, it has smothered a great deal of her personality. Somewhere within her, I feel sure, there is fire and initiative hiding under that shy timidity. Something or someone will call it forth in time. I pray that I may be that someone!

"But what a task you have set me! What wonderful faith you must have had to entrust me with such monumental work!

"The girls have been a day in camp and true to my scheme I have left them utterly to their own resources. Furtively I have studied them a great

deal. I have caught their flashes of jealousy and pique. Ellen Birch I fail utterly to comprehend. Her biting tongue, her keen, unkind wit frequently stir the girls to fretful unrest and bickering when they are otherwise disposed to be just normal, fun-loving girls. And after all they *are* that — they must be! Nature does not make mistakes. Deep down in the hearts of these spoiled youngsters, I'm sure, are the germs of genuine, whole-hearted girlhood. They have merely been displaced by too much fashionable life and a wrong sense of values. What a pity to think and eat and sleep and dream *clothes* when the world is full of such rare and lovely things! Edna fancies she is a woman grown. She is a little child-woman of seventeen — too much of a woman to be a child — too much of a child to be a woman! I pray Heaven I may make her over into a normal girl and smooth away those lines of discontent about her mouth.

" There is a constant and veiled sense of rivalry between Marion Ralston and Edna Holmes, in everything — chiefly, though, in clothes and leadership. Each strives heroically for undisputed rule of the other three.

" Mabel Wing is just a great, fat, lazy, good-

humored youngster who needs exercise and less self-indulgence. She will be easiest to guide.

" The girls, I am sure, do not like camp, save perhaps Ida. And yet Ida too is so afraid of disagreeing with Edna that she will not permit herself to enjoy it. Quiet and manageable as she is in everything else, in anything touching that idolized sister of hers she is unbelievably stubborn. As well try to move her when something touching Edna is at stake — as one of the boulders on the far side of the lake!

" I have as yet said nothing at all of the great scheme. That must bide its time. And the time is certainly not yet ripe.

" The baggage has arrived! Those four words mean more than you could possibly guess without some further explanation! Joe drove up from the village with it this morning. I was utterly thunderstruck! Honestly I have never seen so many trunks in my life! Even the lap of the lake seemed to be saying: ' Trunks and trunks and trunks upon trunks!'

" Joe positively sniggered all the time he was unloading them. He is of course accustomed to the usual scanty luggage of the camper.

"And the reasons for all this baggage? I gather, if you please, that my charges are going to make of camp a fashionable summer resort! Even so. What clothes Edna and Marion had planned for summer hotels and yachts they have bribed servants and coaxed foolish mothers to smuggle up here. Ellen Birch and Mabel Wing have done practically the same. Ida alone has been sensible. She has brought a good many stout, reliable school things. But Ida doesn't think she has grown up, thank fortune! and is still content to be a little girl.

"How sorry I am that all these frills and dressy things are up here where the girls will think about them! They complicate my problem enormously. We have had to store the trunks in two emergency tents which I had had put up in case the camp had guests. Mabel Wing has one trunk which she guards jealously. It was so heavy that it fairly made Joe stagger. I can't imagine what is in it nor am I likely to know, for it seems to be a dark secret to be kept from me by every single girl.

"And the first day in camp? I shall not forget it! True to my resolve to let the girls weary themselves out with lack of resource, I did not

insist upon an early rising, with the result that at ten o'clock — imagine! — the camp was not yet astir. At ten thirty Ida peeped timidly out, said her sister had cried herself to sleep and that now she had a very bad headache. The dear, loyal little kiddie carried her sister's breakfast in to her and Edna breakfasted luxuriously in bed.

" Mabel Wing slept until noon and stumbled out of her tent, yawning and cross. Ellen Birch taunted her in that trying, elfish way she has, and a quarrel ensued. Marion Ralston appeared — dressed exquisitely — in a scarlet gown which set off her dark, vivid face wonderfully but is far too bright a color for any young girl to wear except perhaps for evening. When Edna saw her, she revived — I'm afraid she was simply sulking — and presently she came sauntering forth dressed like a most exquisite fashion-plate. Nora actually gasped aloud. The two went off strolling in the woods and came back in tears. Both of their lovely gowns were torn and ruined by brambles. They had a pretty fretful time of it. I would have liked to have felt a little sorry — but I didn't.

" In the afternoon the girls produced hammocks, swung them among the trees and lay there

luxuriously until sunset, reading novels and eating candy, of which there seems to be an unlimited supply though not a girl has been to the village.

" Mabel went to sleep and slept all afternoon. She reminds me of the fat boy in ' Pickwick Papers.'

" Can you fancy such a lazy, luxurious unwholesome time after what I have told you of my Camp Fire Girls last summer. I can not but contrast the breezy, wholesome energy and activity of that camp with the aristocratic indolence of this. But I am biding my time. When the girls weary of gowns and chocolates — as weary they must without the stimulus of artificial excitement — then will come my opportunity.

" That they are bored to death already I am pretty sure. The idle day gets on their nerves and they quarrel and fret. They dress in their lovely clothes and thereby incapacitate themselves for the real enjoyment of the woods — roughing it! And what a bemoaning of Fate when the brambles tear their lovely frocks!

" They blame the dreadful weariness of the day upon the forest — not upon themselves. They dream of idle, fashionable crowds at summer

resorts, and ignore the wonderful, pine-scented peace and vigor of the forest. Presently I shall teach them to *live* — not in a world of bright shadows, but in a world of realities. I shall teach them to know that this great, everyday world is a place of love and beauty and not merely of clothes; that one does not need chiffons and laces and bonbons and yachts and beaus — Oh, yes, they talk some of that too! — to have a vigorous, wholesome time of unalloyed enjoyment.

" May Hollins will be here to-morrow and June Tuttle joins the camp in a week or so.

" My heart fails me, though, at the task you have set me. I have never worked with just this sort of material before. It will be many a weary day, I fear, before I win the confidence of Edna Holmes or Ellen Birch. Why, oh, why do fashionable mothers let these pretty, sweet little girls grow into women so early? What a great, great pity and what a waste of girlhood! I would not curb one dear sweet hour of genuine childhood.

" The girls glance askance at camp food and camp ways. They have made up their minds to dislike everything and that makes it so much harder for me. Mabel Wing does nothing but

groan. Edna, I think, is most unhappy of all. Nor does she try to make the best of it as once in a while the other girls do.

"But there will be no hitches. My plans are perfectly laid."

CHAPTER V

WAKING MABEL

A gray, dewy forest is a wonderful thing. The cool pervades it like a beneficent spirit.

True to her morning habit, Katherine Fielding rose at dawn and swung off briskly through the quiet forest for her morning tramp, a rosy, determinded young woman in stout walking boots and short skirt, with the collar of her blouse turned back from a smooth, tanned throat. Somehow there was more of girlishness in her natural alertness than in the studied languor of Edna Holmes — for all the difference in years.

A pair of very sharp eyes had watched Miss Fielding swing out of camp. Ellen Birch, sleeping with the tent-sides rolled up, sat up in bed, wide awake and alert, as she usually was, on the very moment of waking.

"Miss Fielding must eat electricity," she reflected, "to want to get up as early as this."

She glanced over at Mabel Wing's tent, where Mabel's huge bulk loomed comfortably beneath a

camp blanket. Though Marion Ralston had been her tent-mate for a while, Mabel had wisely begged a tent to herself because she snored.

Ellen's homely brown face lighted up with elfish mischief.

"Nothing else in the world would persuade me to get up at such an hour as this," she reflected maliciously, "but I simply can't lose this opportunity to annoy Mabel. She'll die if she has to get up before sunrise."

Slipping noiselessly out of bed she stole across and touched her tent-mate, Marion Ralston, on the neck with a bit of stone. It was cold and damp, as Ellen well knew, and Marion jumped.

"Oh, Ellen," she exclaimed sleepily, "what a mean thing for you to do!"

"Oh, I'm always doing mean things," said Ellen indifferently. "Look, Marion, it isn't sunrise yet. Let's all get up and wake Mabel Wing. She'll be furious."

Marion laughed and jumped out of bed.

"I'll race you dressing," suggested Ellen. Laughing and whispering they began to pull on shoes and stockings. Ellen finished ahead. It was a foregone conclusion that she would. The

speed of her thin, brown fingers was always a marvel.

There was an electric energy in Ellen's malice. In a very little time she had the camp astir and dressed and eager for mischief. They ran down to the lake, hurriedly bathed their faces and hands and gathered a score of pebbles. Then, led irresistibly on by Ellen, they collected in a knot by Mabel's tent and began to propel pebbles at the bulky figure under the blanket.

A pebble struck Mabel's hand. She stirred and grunted. Another pebble and still another!

"Get up, Marion," she murmured drowsily, evidently laboring under the impression that Marion was still her tent-mate, "and let down the tent-flaps. It's raining pebbles."

There was a giggle of delight at this characteristic utterance, then the shower of tiny pebbles began again.

Ellen tiptoed in and slowly trickled a bottle of lake water on Mabel's hand.

"Help!" protested Mabel. "Marion, it's raining rain!" She sat up amid a breathless shower of laughter to find a row of mocking faces around her bed.

"Get up!" they counseled her. "We're here to call you."

"Get out!" said Mabel indignantly. "It's only midnight."

Propelled to further mischief by Ellen's energetic orders, they rolled Mabel, shrieking from the bed.

Nora appeared from the camp kitchen and stared.

Seizing Mabel's hands, the girls rushed her violently down to the lake where she halted, panting and aggrieved, her fat, pink face wrinkled sleepily, her night dress billowing in the morning breeze.

Urged on by shrieks of laughter Mabel disgustedly performed her morning ablutions.

A soft glow of pink dyed the further shore of the lake and stole across the sheet of water on wind-ruffled wings. Something of the beauty of it all seemed suddenly to sober the laughing crowd of girls on the lake shore.

"The sunrise!" said Marion Ralston, catching her breath. "See the colors. How wonderful they are! Oh, how I do love brilliant colors!"

Mabel blinked.

"Why," she said, "that's positively gorgeous. I never saw a sunrise before in my life!"

Huddled together they watched the dawn deepen, watched the rose-glow spread and color the world; then the great, glowing disk of the sun flashed above the treetops and stained the world with vivid light.

Now there was something in the thrill of the early morning's life and color that subdued even Ellen. A little quiet, they walked back to camp and sat by Mabel's tent while she dressed.

"I'm gettin' breakfast this minute," sang Nora from the camp kitchen, "and we'll all be surprisin' Miss Katherine. What with ye sleepin' close to noon before and up with the sun this mornin', 'tis likely she'll lose the two eyes of her."

Presently the camp fire was crackling and the woods fragrant with the smell of coffee.

A pleasant glow of anticipation shone in the face of each girl at the thought of Miss Fielding's surprise. Even Edna, strive as she would to conceal her feelings under a studied mask of polite indifference, dimpled when at last Miss Fielding swung into camp and halted, petrified at the sight that met her eyes.

"Up so early!" she exclaimed in delight. "Well, I *am* surprised. Whose wonderful inspiration was this? Ida's?"

Ida slipped an apologetic little hand into Miss Katherine's.

"'Twasn't I, Miss Fielding," she said fairly. "I do wish it had been. It was Ellen."

Katherine turned swiftly.

"Why, Ellen," she exclaimed, "how nice of you, dear, and you did it all to surprise me!"

For the first time Ellen lost her pert air. She colored hotly.

"Miss Fielding," she blurted, "I — I made the girls get up just — just so we could all annoy Mabel. She — she hates so to get up —"

There was a sudden hush.

Katherine Fielding held out her hand.

"I'm sorry for that, Ellen," she said gently, "but I am glad you spoke up so honestly. I like that."

It was then that Ellen's shame flashed in her eyes. For one instant the dark little gypsy face turned fiery red, then she burst into a wild shower of tears and scurried off to her tent, leaving an astonished group by the camp fire.

"I have learned a little more of Ellen," Katherine Fielding wrote that night to her unknown correspondent. "Somehow I have penetrated that pert, saucy shell of hers and found something more beneath. She is quick with her tongue and her fingers but she misuses them both — why, I can't make out — yet. And she is brave enough to be honest. I wonder if with her shrewdness she sees the petty shortcomings of her friends and despises them for it. It may be the solution of her acrid remarks. I wonder."

CHAPTER VI

THE CAMP FIRE INSPIRATION

Looking back later, when the summer was but a vivid, unforgettable memory, the girls wondered when the Camp Fire inspiration had come forth from the forest on the wings of a pine-scented wind. No one was sure save perhaps Miss Fielding, and Miss Fielding wisely kept her own counsel. Some of the girls fancied it had begun with May Hollins, a pale, awkward, silent girl who arrived in camp on the third day of fretful idleness with tales of a merry band of Camp Fire Girls dressed in serviceable blouses and rough skirts, who were on their way to a camp farther north, singing contagious Camp Fire songs.

Then there had been an unforgettable night when by the camp fire Miss Fielding had told wonderful tales of a group of Camp Fire Girls who had camped with her the summer before, tales of council fires and picturesque maidens in Indian costume and headbands, keen, alert, efficient girls who wore strung about their necks, on thongs of

leather, beads of many colors honorably won. Miss Fielding's cheeks had fairly glowed with enthusiasm as she told how work and health and love had brought many things to many girls, brightened a life or two, helped an unhappy girl or so find herself and work that was no longer work because it was pleasure; and how in the doing the summer had been but an endless round of good-fellowship and good-feeling — and how *Wohelo — wo* from wo-rk, *he* from he-alth and *lo* from lo-ve was the musical watchword of the movement.

Ida Holmes had listened with eyes as bright as the stars above the lake. May Hollins, usually so silent, had spoken again and again of the happy chorus of Camp Fire Girls singing on their way to camp, and each girl by the fire had seemed fairly fascinated by Miss Fielding's splendid tales of the summer before — save Edna. Edna as usual listened with a grown-up air of aloofness as if her body alone were by the camp fire and her spirit wandering to pleasanter places where the summer was gay and not so lonely as here in the quiet forest.

How the camp fire had crackled and the lake

crooned as if a spirit of sympathy impelled them to sing! How the girls, unconsciously absorbed, had bent closer and closer to hear the delightful tales of comradeship and good-feeling that Miss Fielding unfolded by the flickering fire. For Miss Fielding's clear, sweet voice was marvelously eloquent and one could not help picturing somehow the stately march of the Indian maids to the council fire, and the night when the sickly little girl who had cried for health won her health beads after sturdy weeks of Camp Fire work.

"Miss Fielding," asked May Hollins breathlessly, "was she really strong and well — like — like other girls?"

"Always after that," nodded Miss Fielding, "for the Camp Fire work had helped her so much, you see, and she kept it up. She walked and rode and swam —"

There was a hush and then May spoke again, her pale cheeks catching some of that bright color she craved.

"Miss Fielding," she begged wistfully, "did she — did she get red cheeks?"

"Indeed she did," laughed Katherine Fielding. "After three months in the woods, May, her

cheeks were just like apples. And she was the sunniest, happiest, prettiest little girl where before she had always moped and cried because she couldn't do the things that the other girls did. Before she had never tried. The Camp Fire work made her try."

"I love red cheeks," said May and her voice broke a little. It was almost a sob of envy.

Poor, pale, awkward little May! Katherine's eyes were very gentle. How easy to help her — if only — if only — but Mabel Wing was speaking.

"Miss Fielding," she began abruptly, "was there any fat girl there who grew thin — "

"There were plenty of girls who grew thinner," laughed Miss Fielding, "for at first, you see, Mabel, we had a great many foolish girls who ate candy between meals and slept too much. But after they got fairly into the spirit of the Camp Fire work, they didn't do such things."

Mabel flushed and stared into the fire.

"I wish I'd been one of those that got a little thinner," she said.

Miss Fielding went on in her sweet, pleasant way with tales of a girl who had made a birch canoe quite by herself, of a girl who had taught

another band of girls folk-dancing; she told of the Camp Fire songs and of the Camp Fire ways.

"And I've some copies of the 'Good Night Song' in my tent," she finished. "Let me get it and we'll all sing it here by the fire just for a lark. You'll all know the tune, I'm sure. It's 'Drink to me only with thine eyes.'"

"Now," she said when she had returned from her tent and passed the copies around, "you can picture to yourself my Camp Fire Girls last summer in Indian suits and headbands, singing this before we turned in for the night."

Miss Fielding sang the song through once in a clear, musical contralto, then, timidly, one by one the girls joined her:

"'The sun is sinking in the West,
The evening shadows fall;
Across the silence of the lake,
We hear the loons' low call.
So let us, too, the silence keep,
And softly steal away
To rest and sleep until the morn
Brings forth another day.'"

The song died away. Miss Fielding saw with some surprise that May Hollins was crying.

"I — I was thinking of the girl who got red cheeks," she whispered with a little sob. "Oh, Miss Fielding, I — I'm always so pale and tired and I'm never hungry like other girls — "

Miss Fielding put her arms around the girl's shaking shoulders and comforted her as best she could.

Again an odd silence fell over the camp. Then whether the pine-wind or the lap of the lake whispered it — who may say? Whatever the message that sang through the woods, it was Ida Holmes who interpreted it.

"Miss Fielding," she whispered impulsively, "I — I'd just love to be a Camp Fire Girl!"

"And so would I!" said May, wiping her eyes.

Ellen Birch opened her lips to say something, thought better of it, flushed and stared at the fire.

Mabel Wing, spurred into unaccustomed enthusiasm by the song, nodded emphatically.

"I can't forget those girls that got thin," she said. "Miss Fielding, I don't see why we can't all be Camp Fire Girls. We've a camp and girls and a fire — and it's surely a better way to spend the summer than the way we have been doing. What do you say, Marion?"

"I — I think I'd like it," said Marion.

Only Edna remained silent.

Miss Fielding's face looked first intensely relieved, then radiant.

"It would please me more than anything else in the world," she said honestly. "I — I've thought of it a good many times but I never dared suggest it. I'd love to have every one of you know how jolly it is to be a Camp Fire Girl." She smiled and kissed the younger girls good night. A little subdued they all filed away to their tents.

"Oh, Edna," exclaimed Ida as they climbed into bed, "I'm just wild about it, the Camp Fire Girls, I mean. Don't you think it's going to be loads of fun?"

"Anything," said Edna with a shudder, "will be different from these last hideous days. I've been terribly unhappy."

"And thanks to May Hollins, our newest arrival," wrote Miss Fielding to her unknown confidant, "it came about so easily — this thing that I so much desired and somehow dared not suggest when the girls were so antagonistic and unfriendly. It was surely time for some new influence of a wholesome nature, for the girls have

been quarreling and fretting terribly. Ellen Birch has been more perverse than one could imagine since that morning she unconsciously gave me a glimpse of the real girl inside. Mabel Wing has seemed to grow a little fatter, a little lazier, a little sleepier each day.

"I am writing to-night for costumes and headbands, for record books in which the girls may record their good times and the honors they win, for honor beads and thongs to string them with, for blouses and bloomers and rough skirts and moccasins. Oh, if only the girls did not have all those fashionable, foolish clothes! My hardest task, I fear, will be to wean them away from them."

CHAPTER VII

MABEL WING'S REVENGE

Miss Fielding did not allow the enthusiasm of the girls to wane. At supper the next night there was excited talk of a name for the camp. Miss Fielding was glad to see that interest in a common object seemed somehow to bring with it more of girlish eagerness and spontaneity.

Off to the west there was a giant pine tree of unusual stature and beautiful outline. At night it stood out vividly against the moonlit sky, and against the sunset it was like a glorified shadow rimmed with fire. Ida shyly suggested that they might call the camp "Pine-Tree Camp," and this they did.

"That is an excellent name," nodded Miss Fielding cordially, "because the symbol of membership is a pine tree. It stands for simplicity and strength." She went on to speak of the fire about which the first primitive homes were built and how the camp fire thus not only symbolized

the home but the freedom and freshness of woodland life.

"There is health in the forest," she exclaimed, conscious that May Hollins' wistful eyes were riveted upon her face, "and fun! The Camp Fire spirit soon teaches us how to find it. There is fun in work and work in fun, isn't there?"

Mabel Wing looked doubtful. Work was an energetic word. Fun to her meant indolence.

When at last the Camp Fire group was organized and each girl was wearing the silver ring of membership which betokened her initial rank as Wood Gatherer, Miss Fielding smilingly pledged them all to early rising.

Mabel Wing looked blank.

"I — I didn't know you had to get up early to be a Camp Fire Girl!" she exclaimed uneasily. "Miss Fielding, I'll never be able to do it."

"I'll help you!" said Ellen Birch meaningly.

Miss Fielding wisely made no comment.

And thus it was that the others, urged on by Ellen Birch, took upon themselves the responsibility of Mabel's rising.

It was no easy task. Mornings Ellen relentlessly roused the camp before Miss Fielding her-

self was astir. She led the charge on Mabel's tent and supplied the girls with endless pebbles.

"If she'd only bend that remarkable energy of hers to some worthier cause!" thought Miss Fielding. "She has more vitality than any girl I ever knew."

But for reasons of her own, Miss Fielding did not interfere with the daily ceremony of waking Mabel.

It was all in vain for the victim to plead and beg and whimper and threaten when the morning brigade arrived. After the pebbles had showered about her cot for an uncomfortable interval, she simply had to get up in self-defense. To be sure, there were one or two quarrels but, nothing daunted, the girls kept on. The morning escapade, born though it was in Ellen's peculiar malice, appealed to each girl's inherent love of mischief. And early rising might have been more difficult for them all had it not been stimulated by the fun of waking Mabel.

There came a day, however, when the worm turned, as worms will.

Joe, coming up from the village one afternoon with another mysterious and very heavy trunk

for Mabel Wing, found her awaiting him on the far side of the lake among a clump of birches. It was the hour when Joe rode up with mail and papers.

"Hello, Miss Wing," he said. "Got a trunk for you."

Mabel inspected the trunk with shining eyes.

"My!" she said. "But I am glad to see that. The other's empty. Joe," her voice lowered mysteriously, "I want you to buy me an alarm clock in the village — something substantial that will keep on running under a pillow — and don't you dare breathe a single word of it to a soul in that camp."

Much impressed, Joe promised.

"I'll be right here at this very spot to-morrow afternoon to get it," said Mabel. "Don't disappoint me."

Joe conscientiously fulfilled his errand. With the exception of one startling interval when the alarm went off in the forest, Mabel arrived in camp without accident.

That night, glancing thoughtfully at a cloud or so that hung above the lake, she called across to May Hollins that it looked like rain.

"Better close the sides of your tent then," said May.

"Just what I'm going to do," said Mabel with a chuckle. Then seized by an unexpected fit of laughter, she roused the camp to a storm of protest.

"Go to sleep," said Ellen Birch. Mabel merely lowered the sides of her tent and laughed some more.

Safe from the prying eyes of the others, she laboriously wound the alarm clock, muffled it in a shirt waist and put it under her pillow. Then undressing hastily she scrambled into bed and was soon asleep.

There was surely something the matter with the length of the night, for Mabel was scarcely comfortably asleep, she thought, before something insistent disturbed her slumber.

"Great Scott," she blinked, "my pillow's exploding!"

Rubbing her eyes she sat up and remembered the alarm clock.

It was pounding away in muffled rhythm beneath the pillow.

When it was quite through ringing, Mabel

removed the pillow and struck a match. It was a quarter after four.

"Funny," she grumbled. "That's just the time I set it for, but I know very well I haven't been in bed ten minutes. Know very well I haven't. 'Tisn't over ten minutes ago that I called good night to the girls and pulled down the tent-flaps. Guess I'll go back to bed. Quarter after four is a lot earlier than I thought it was."

She sat very still and very drowsy for a fraction of a second. Then she yawned and squared her shoulders.

"Mabel Wing," she began severely, "you'll get up exactly as you planned. You're terribly lazy. That's why you're so fat. And you'll get the best of Ellen Birch if it is the hardest thing you ever set out to do in your life."

Shivering, for the gray morning was chill, Mabel crept into her clothes and lifting the tent-flap stole off noiselessly toward the forest.

It was hardly gray. Night lingered in the hollows. Indeed, the forest looked a little darker than Mabel liked, but the lake was lighter and the sky promised coming grayness for the world.

Mabel squared her chin and mustering all her courage swung off through the forest.

"When those girls discover that I've been off for a morning tramp while they were all snug in their beds asleep," she thought, chuckling, "they'll be thunderstruck. They'll never get over it. Nobody ever seems to think that I can walk with my legs like anybody else. Ellen said so. My! how nice and fresh everything smells. I don't believe I was ever up as early as this before in my life. I'm going to telegraph father. He ought to know it."

Now as Mabel swung energetically along — for there was something in the chill morning wind that made you walk fast to keep warm, her sluggish blood began to thrill and presently she fell to whistling.

"Well!" she exclaimed, halting, "I — I do believe I'm having a good time. It can't be, of course; nobody ever had a good time just getting up early — but it certainly does seem so."

The forest was heavy with dew. Presently the grayness of the sky filtered through the branches and the dawn began to come. Mabel tramped on,

spurred by the thought of the girls back in camp.

"Of course," she reflected, "Ellen Birch will lead the girls over to my tent as usual — she wouldn't miss that for worlds! When they find I'm gone, I hope they'll be scared to death. Serves 'em right. I hope," went on Mabel, growing tragic and aggrieved as she began to pity herself, "I hope they decide that I've thrown myself into the lake just because they annoy me so when I don't want to get up. I hope they think somebody's carried me off in the night for ransom — though a kidnapper'd likely have to be terribly strong to get away with me without spraining his spine. I — I hope when they see I'm gone that they'll be sorry for the way they've pestered me."

Back in camp, with the coming of the dawn Ellen had roused the girls. Giggling and expectant, for Ellen had evolved a new scheme with which to pester Mabel, they dressed and collected outside the victim's tent.

"We can't throw pebbles this morning," whispered Marion Ralston in disappointment. "She's kept her tent closed all night."

Ellen shrugged.

"That doesn't matter in the least," she said.

"I'm going to climb that tree there. See, the lower branch just brushes Mabel's tent. Then I'll cut a tiny slit in the top of the tent with my pen-knife and drop the pebbles through. She'll never dream where they're coming from."

"Oh, don't cut her tent, Ellen," implored Ida Holmes. "We ought not do that. Miss Fielding wouldn't like it, I'm sure."

"Silly," said Ellen scornfully. "Miss Fielding doesn't have to know. We can sew it up again. Beside I'd have to cut a slit in the tent anyway — for this."

She produced a monstrous green metal bug with bulging eyes and spread wings.

"Joe bought it for me," she explained. "See, I'm going to hang it down the slit just above Mabel's cot. Then when the pebbles annoy her and she sits up, this dreadful bug will be exactly in front of her eyes. She'll likely scream and slap at it and if she does it'll just swing away on the thread and come back and Mabel'll be too sleepy to know what's going on. I wish she'd left her tent open. Then we could see the whole show."

The girls huddled in a little expectant group. From a thicket of trees not so far away a pair of

round blue eyes watched the remainder of the proceedings with a great deal of interest.

Ellen nimbly climbed the tree, cut a slit in the tent roof, tied the green bug to a branch and lowered it through the slit.

Then very slowly she began to drop pebbles through the opening to wake her victim up.

One pebble — two — three — four — five.

If the girls had not been quite so absorbed, they might have heard a snicker from the bushes.

Six — seven —eight pebbles!

"Funny she doesn't wake and scream!" said Ellen frowning. "I know she hates bugs."

Patiently — for impatient as she was Ellen could always be patient in something that involved the discomfort of another, she dropped a few more pebbles in. Still no result. The girls laughed. Nettled at the failure of her scheme, Ellen applied one eye to the slit and tried to peer down into the tent below.

Then from the thicket of trees and bushes close at hand, came an ironic voice that made them jump.

"Well, girls," said the voice with a snicker,

"I hope you're having a nice time. The lady isn't home."

Fully dressed, eyes dancing and cheeks scarlet from her walk, Mabel Wing strolled forth from the bushes and into camp.

The girls screamed. For once in her life, Ellen Birch looked utterly disconcerted and her sharp tongue failed.

"Where — where have you been?" gasped May Hollins.

"Oh," said Mabel carelessly, "just out for a morning tramp. Did you girls oversleep? Haul up your green bug, Ellen. He can't scare the pillows and there's nothing else there. And mind you, Ellen Birch — " there was an unexpected energy in Mabel's voice, "you march and get a needle and sew up that slit in my tent or there'll be trouble!"

The girls stared. Where had Mabel unearthed the energy in her voice and the confidence in her manner?

Mabel, glowing from her brisk walk, was merely enjoying an energy of spirit impelled by an unaccustomed energy of body.

The girls giggled a little — then fell silent. Mabel was the only one of the group quite at her ease and her eyes were twinkling with intense enjoyment. Looking up she met the eyes of Katherine Fielding, who had joined the girls, unnoticed.

"Mabel," said Miss Fielding, "I couldn't help seeing it all from my tent and I must confess I've enjoyed every minute of it. You've got the best of the girls fairly and squarely."

Ellen Birch scrambled down out of the tree with a pert toss of her wren-like head.

"Mabel Wing," she said tartly, "I don't care whether you like what I'm going to say or not. I never thought you had wit enough to do anything half so neat as this. And I like you better than I did before. I'll sew up your tent in a jiffy."

And she was gone, leaving an astonished group behind her.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BURNING OF TEMPTATION

In an absolute glow of satisfaction with herself and the world, Mabel set her alarm clock again and took another early morning walk, partly because she still had tingling, delightful memories of the other, and partly because Ellen Birch had threatened to begin her crusade again if Mabel slept late.

This time she did not muffle her alarm clock, with the result that it roused the whole camp and a crowd of sleepy girls feebly cheered her as she set forth at dawn.

On the third morning Mabel arose again, grimly set forth with a pail of pebbles she'd collected the night before and tormented the whole camp into rising.

On the fourth morning all the girls save Edna went off on a dawn tramp with Miss Fielding.

"And I can thank you for it all, Mabel!" exclaimed Miss Fielding. "I am delighted. Don't

you feel a great deal better when you don't sleep so late? "

"It's a queer thing," admitted Mabel honestly, "and I don't understand it, but — I — I really believe I do. Somehow I don't mind getting up either when the alarm goes off. Each morning it's a little easier. Used to be I'd wake up early enough but I'd go to sleep again and then it was awfully hard to get up."

"That second sleep after you've once awakened at a reasonable hour," said Miss Fielding, "is always a sluggish sleep.

"If you keep up your morning tramps, Mabel," suggested Miss Fielding a little later, "you'll not only win some honor beads but you'll find you'll lose weight as well."

"Honor beads!" exclaimed Mabel, flushing with pleasure. "Miss Katherine, you don't mean it."

"Indeed I do," said Miss Katherine. "You can win health beads that way."

"You mean," said Mabel slowly, "that I can win health beads just by getting up early in the morning and tramping through the woods?

Why — why it's fun and I thought you had to do hard things to win honor beads! "

" Didn't I tell you," reminded Miss Katherine pleasantly, " that there is fun in work and work in fun! "

Mabel flushed.

" Why," she blurted impulsively, " I was thinking that when it came time to award the honor beads I wouldn't get any because there's really nothing I can do well and — and I'm lazy, but — but honestly, Miss Katherine, if — if I can truly win honor beads just by getting up and tramping and tramping, why I'll tramp my legs off! "

There was a real glow of determination in Mabel's pink face.

" And I do believe it is fun," she said. " I never would have believed it if I hadn't tried it myself that first morning. The forest is so gray and cool and now that all the other girls come along it's loads of fun."

There was, of course, occasional backsliding. Edna went only occasionally. May Hollins went simply because she always followed mutely at Mabel's heels no matter what Mabel did. But for

the most part now when Mabel's alarm pealed through the quiet dawn every girl leaped from bed and began to dress. There was a significant bucket of pebbles by Mabel's tent in eloquent promise of what would happen if she didn't.

"Next time, Ellen Birch," grumbled Edna one morning, "you'll let sleeping dogs lie. Look what you've made of Mabel just by tormenting her. She's a perfect pest."

"I'm glad she woke up," said Ellen. "Some of these days I hope you'll take a tumble and wake up too. You need to."

"But I don't get any thinner, Miss Katherine," Mabel protested one morning. "And I walk and walk."

"I wonder," said Miss Katherine thoughtfully, "if you'll let me tell you why I think you don't."

Mabel nodded.

"Well," said Miss Katherine, "the whole trouble, in my mind, Mabel, is the fact that you eat such prodigious quantities of candy. Why, you're always eating it — rich, chocolate things that you ought to eat very sparingly indeed. Where in the world you get it, I don't know, and I've never asked, but you know yourself, Mabel,

that you're always eating candy and so is May Hollins."

Mabel looked guilty.

"If I stop," she asked, "will I get thinner?"

"If you stop eating candy," said Miss Fielding with decision, "and keep up your morning tramps, I'll be greatly surprised if you don't find a difference in your weight within a month."

Mabel flushed with delight.

"Miss Fielding," she blurted, "I wish I'd had somebody to tell me things like that before. I've always done as I pleased and I thought no matter what I did I'd stay fat, until that night by the camp fire when you told us how the girls got thinner just by living in the woods in a healthful way."

"There's something else," began Miss Fielding, "and I do hope you won't mind my speaking of it, Mabel. It's a great pity that not one of us can do anything foolish without hurting or influencing someone else. I wonder if you know that just by eating so much candy you're hurting someone else?"

Mabel looked incredulous.

"Who?" she demanded.

"May Hollins," said Miss Fielding.

Mabel's eyes grew very big and round.

"May fairly worships you," explained Miss Fielding gravely. "Look how she follows you around. She's always with you. She fairly hates and dreads these morning tramps, I know, and yet she comes along because you do. And so, Mabel, whenever you eat candy, May does. That's why she's never hungry. She eats so much candy that when it's time for good, substantial, health-giving food, she doesn't want it. And the result is — she's thin and listless and pale."

"And it's my fault!" exclaimed Mabel aghast. "Miss Katherine, I never thought of that. Honestly I didn't." And then, a little later, "If it makes May thin to eat so much candy, why doesn't it make me thin."

"You're naturally very strong and healthy," pointed out Miss Fielding. "And you always seem to have a good appetite no matter how much candy you eat. May doesn't. The candy spoils what little appetite she has. You eat heartily and don't exercise and of course you simply go on getting fatter. May doesn't eat and stays pale and thin."

"Hum!" said Mabel. "That's funny, isn't it?"

They swung on in silence for a while.

"Miss Fielding," confessed Mabel suddenly, her round face very guilty, "I want to tell you that I brought a trunk-load of chocolate peppermints up to camp with me. My mother didn't know it and the girls were all pledged to keep it from you for fear you'd scold. And just the day before yesterday there was another trunkfull of candy came. I wrote my cousin to get it for me—"

"A trunkfull of candy!" exclaimed Miss Fielding aghast. "Mabel!"

"I know it's perfectly dreadful," said Mabel. "Joe was dying with curiosity to know what was in it—it was so heavy—but—but—I'm sorry now—"

"Yes?"

"And now that I know it's hurting May—I'm going to turn over a new leaf."

Miss Fielding held out her hand.

"That's the real Camp Fire spirit," she said heartily, "to do something that will help someone else. And by giving up candy, Mabel, you're

going to help May more than you dream. I'd like to see poor thin little May get those red cheeks she wants, wouldn't you? ''

'' Why,'' said Mabel in a glow, '' I'd rather see May Hollins get red cheeks than have 'em myself. Honestly I would. And,'' she added with a brisk, business-like nod, '' I'm going to see that she does get 'em. She'll do anything I say.''

Mabel, disciplining herself for no particular reason, reflected Miss Fielding, would very likely have been a failure. Mabel, disciplining herself for the sake of another, might very well be a conspicuous success.

The camp was considerably astonished the next day to receive slabs of birch-bark carefully inscribed in Mabel's sprawling handwriting.

'' A trunkfull of chocolate peppermints will be cremated to-night at the dark of the moon,'' read the invitation. '' You are cordially invited to attend, with a funereal face and proper respect for the ceremony.''

'' What in the world does it mean? '' asked May Hollins apprehensively. '' You — you don't suppose Mabel's going to murder all those good mints, do you? ''

"Miss Fielding says a real Camp Fire Girl doesn't eat candy all the time," said Ida. "Maybe that has something to do with Mabel's stunt. And Mabel certainly does get terrible streaks of enthusiasm lately. Haven't you noticed? I think it's because she's so crazy about Miss Fielding and wants to please her."

"Maybe," put in Ellen Birch keenly, "maybe she thinks she has to put temptation entirely out of the way or backslide."

One glance at Mabel on a stool outside her tent, scratching her head thoughtfully, her round, pink face very grave and preoccupied, her hand writing an occasional word or so on a slip of paper, was sufficient to prove that something was afoot. Mabel was plainly in the throes of a melancholy enthusiasm.

Joe came with the mail and papers and Mabel bustled out to meet him. There was some commotion in her tent and presently Joe came staggering forth with a trunk which he carried down to a cleared space by the lake shore.

There was some doubt as the day wore on as to just what period of the night was meant by the dark of the moon, as there wasn't any moon.

Mabel explained that it was merely a poetic phrase to fit the dark sadness of the occasion and that the cremation would occur as soon as the day put on mourning — in other words, as soon as it was quite dark. On all other points of the dreadful ceremony, however, she maintained a solemn silence.

At eight o'clock Mabel emerged from her tent carrying a lighted candle and struck a gong three times. Giggling, the girls clustered about her. With a business-like air of bereavement, Mabel passed around candles, made an impressive ceremony of lighting them from the taper in her hand, and ended by distributing certain laboriously written verses of a funeral dirge.

"Fellow mourners," she began tragically, "you will oblige me by singing this sad composition of mine to the tune of 'John Brown's Body' while we march to the scene of the — er — what was that word, Miss Fielding?"

"Holocaust," said Miss Fielding.

"Holocaust," finished Mabel. Conscious of a suppressed titter among the mourners, she fixed them with a hollow glare.

"I must respectfully beg you," she added, "to conduct yourself with the — er — mournful dignity befitting an — er — occasion of considerable sorrow to me. Fall in! Mark time! Ready — march!"

Giggling hysterically the girls fell into line.

Miss Fielding brought up the rear, her eyes twinkling with amusement. Though she had had some slight misgivings about the extravagance of Mabel's act, she had eventually decided that the end would justify the means. Just so long as those peppermints were in camp Mabel would eat prodigious quantities of them; and just so long as Mabel indulged, May Hollins would follow her example. Besides, there was a genuine spirit of girlhood and fun in this frolic — the sort of spirit Miss Fielding longed to encourage.

Lighted candles in hand, the melancholy procession filed down to the lake shore, chanting:

"Mine eyes have seen the evil of my candy-eating ways,
I am going to start all over with a lot of mintless days;

I am going to thrash May Hollins if she eats
another cream;
That trunk of stuff is doomed!"

May Hollins balked at the third line.

"I don't see why you had to mention me especially," she said indignantly. "Every single girl here eats candy."

Mabel, beating time with a huge stick, airily waved a command at her to be silent and the chorus went on—

"Glory, glory Hallelujah,
Glory, glory Hallelujah,
Glory, glory Hallelujah,
That trunk of stuff is doomed."

The chant aroused a furore of enthusiasm.

With the candle in her hand Mabel lighted the dry brush of which Joe had fashioned the funeral pyre. Face to face at last with the dreadful moment, the girls gasped. Surely a daring spirit was embedded somewhere in Mabel Wing's fat body!

A flame crept up snake-like through the brush. It grew, it blazed, it roared, bathing the lake shore

in a baleful glimmer. A sickening smell of burning sugar floated forth on the warm night wind.

Mabel groaned in an agony of spirit.

"I — I can't stand it, Miss Fielding," she blurted, covering her eyes with her hands. "Truly I can't. It's a terrible waste of perfectly good peppermints."

"It's foolish," whimpered May Hollins. "No one but you would think of such a thing, Mabel Wing."

"It's foolish," said Mabel, "but it's sense. And don't you ever dare speak to me that way again, May Hollins," she added with terrible solemnity. "I did that for you! Didn't I, Miss Fielding?"

"You certainly did," said Miss Fielding. May stared.

It was all a little puzzling. But, after all, it was Mabel, and Mabel was a creature of impulses. Only Mabel would have a trunk of chocolates sent to her in the first place — and only Mabel would burn it!

"Who will rescue the burning companion of Mabel's idle days?" intoned Ellen Birch. "Who will come forward in this dreadful moment of

affliction and offer her life for the sake of a chocolate cream? ''

Nobody seemed entirely willing to rescue the mints at such a price and in silence the girls watched the pyre burn down to embers.

Mabel marched sadly back to camp.

'' Now then, Miss Fielding,'' she said anxiously, '' nobody could say I didn't do things up brown, could they? ''

'' Certainly not,'' said Miss Fielding. '' Bless your heart, Mabel, you're a brick! ''

Mabel beamed with delight.

'' And I'll see that May tramps her legs off,'' she went on sturdily. '' May Hollins,'' she added, wheeling upon her chum, '' when my alarm clock goes off in the morning, don't let me see you loafing in bed one second. You walk with me.''

'' Oh, Mabel,'' whimpered May sleepily, '' I hate walking. I — I thought maybe I'd sleep to-morrow morning. Edna doesn't always get up — ''

'' Edna can do as she pleases,'' said Mabel. '' You walk or I won't speak to you for a week.''

And May walked, not only that morning but many a morning to follow. Day by day the walks

became longer. Mabel saw to that. There were no more lazy intervals of candy eating in camp. Miss Fielding organized a swimming class. In the long, hot afternoons, instead of swinging drowsily in hammocks, the girls began to embroider their ceremonial robes. Only Edna held aloof. Miss Fielding despaired of ever winning either the girl's friendship or her confidence. Marion Ralston was somehow far more tractable.

There came a day when Mabel, unbelievably persistent in her supervision of May's days, calmly marched her victim down three miles of rough road to the village and the two rode back with Joe.

May jumped out of the wagon with more eagerness than she usually displayed.

"Wonder when supper will be ready!" she exclaimed. "I'm as hungry as a bear."

Miss Fielding and Mabel exchanged significant glances.

"And I weighed myself, Miss Fielding," said Mabel jubilantly. "I've lost three quarters of a pound!" She could not have said three quarters of a ton more impressively.

"It's a good beginning," admitted Miss Fielding.

"Good beginning!" exclaimed Mabel. "Why, dear me, Miss Fielding, it's a wonderful beginning. The most I ever lost before was to gain a pound." Which was a typical Mabel Wing speech and the girls laughed.

"I telegraphed my father," went on Mabel proudly. "I simply had to. I said — 'Camp Fire life is turning me into a shadow. Have lost three quarters of a pound.' Father will be sure to answer that, for likely he'll be worried."

Father's answer came in course of time.

"Eat plenty of milk and eggs and you'll get it back," he wired. "But why not stay a shadow? We've never had one in the family."

That was but the beginning. Mabel, with the impetus of a rolling snowball, gathered resolution even as the snowball gathers snow. She rose early and tramped incredible distances, learned to swim and splashed heavily about in the water like some huge, good-humored fish. Very slowly at first her weight began to lessen. She lost one pound — two pounds — then five. At last with a squeal of delight she was able to report ten and after that her enthusiasm knew no bounds. There was danger of her overdoing it.

Now, wherever Mabel went, losing pounds laboriously by the wayside, May Hollins went too. First with May came an appetite — an appetite that came to stay. Then very slowly her cheeks began to grow rounder and fuller and her skin clearer. Mabel gazed at her in blank astonishment.

"I don't understand it, May," she said. "You must certainly come along behind me and pick up those pounds I lose. We're a funny pair. You get fat doing the very things that make me thin."

"Look at May's cheeks," said Miss Fielding slyly one morning. "The morning air's been painting rose-buds."

With a shriek of delight Mabel ran for a hand-glass.

"May Hollins," she said, "I vowed I'd see that you got red cheeks and you've certainly got 'em."

May glanced in the hand-glass and cried with joy.

With a wild thrill of enthusiasm the girls cheered for the Camp Fire work.

CHAPTER IX

JUNE TUTTLE

With the arrival of June Tuttle, a handsome girl with flaming hair and a wonderful complexion, who brought with her endless trunks of fashionable attire, the camp backslid. Once more it took on the semblance of a summer resort.

June had a fertile brain. She devised endless parties to which the girls came dressed daintily in their beautiful summer frocks. She had Joe bring up ice cream and candy from the village; she scoffed fastidiously at the Camp Fire blouses and bloomers which the younger girls had begun to wear, and once more Miss Fielding watched her camp enter upon a fretful period of jealousy and bickering.

Pine-Tree Camp, for a time, witnessed no morning tramps or swimming frolics. June's derision had made the girls self-conscious. Ida and May laid aside their bloomers in some embarrassment and dressed much as June did. Only Ellen Birch, her small dark eyes snapping fire, clung to the

rough and ready camp attire, with a glance of scorn at the others.

For June's haughty cleverness was dominating them all. The leadership over which Edna and Marion had been rivals so long had been seized and held by a third.

With sickening foreboding Katherine Fielding watched her days of work vanish. Very gently she tried to win the girls back to some show of interest in the Camp Fire ways, only to find her efforts subtly counteracted by June's insistent ridicule. Next Miss Fielding tried to win June's confidence — tried to enlist her in the Camp Fire ranks. June languidly took refuge in a somewhat snobbish civility and refused to join.

" Oh," wrote Katherine Fielding at last, " I am so discouraged. June Tuttle has stirred the girls into unbelievable unrest. Again — think of it! — here in camp we dress for dinner! We have fashionable parties and all the silly things I had hoped we had left behind. All because June Tuttle has brought with her so many wonderful gowns and is seeking to eclipse the others. Clothes! Clothes! Clothes! I hate them. Would to Heaven they had all shared the fate of Mabel's chocolate creams.

"For a time the girls were eagerly interested in embroidering their ceremonial robes and we talked much of the first council fire when we could wear them. Now June has been so intensely amused that the girls will not work on them. To that I must except Ellen Birch. Ellen defiantly clings to her blouse and bloomers and works religiously on the embroidery on her robe to prove to June that she doesn't care. June Tuttle is a snob. Indeed she treats me very much as she would treat a sort of upper servant in her father's house. How may I ever break through such a wall of contempt as that? She is civil enough but very supercilious. I don't wish to seem ungenerous, but, Oh! I do wish she hadn't come. Save for Edna every one of the girls was interested in the Camp Fire work and the days were so much happier than now."

But the girls were bound to grow tired of June's insolent rule. There came a day when a wholesome wave of rebellion swept through the camp.

"I think it's perfectly terrible the way June speaks about Miss Fielding," said Mabel Wing.

"And I," said Marion Ralston unexpectedly. "Miss Fielding is a dear."

"She's awfully sorry about the Camp Fire work," put in Ida shyly.

A wave of guilt swept over the group.

"June's made so much fun of us all — " began May Hollins.

"Let's give June Tuttle a final chance to join the Camp Fire Girls," put in Ellen Birch tartly. "If she doesn't join, we'll simply go about our regular Camp Fire routine just as Miss Fielding planned, and let June entertain herself. See how she'll like that. She'll get pretty lonesome, I'm thinking. I'm tired of her bossy ways."

"So am I," came a general chorus in which the voices of Edna and Marion were especially fervent.

"Then why," demanded Ellen contemptuously, "did you let her ridicule you into dropping everything? You've hurt Miss Fielding and you haven't had half so good a time as you were having before June came. Miss Fielding kept you busy and interested every minute of the day — everybody, I mean, except Edna, and she's too grown-up to be interested. Now none of you do anything but dress and quarrel."

The girls looked too guilty to resent Ellen's

sharp criticism and even Edna remained silent.

"Who's ready for a regular lark?" demanded Ellen.

"I am," said Marion Ralston.

"And I," said May and Ida.

"And I," said Edna Holmes.

Ellen flashed her a keen inquiring glance.

"You suspect that I'm going to make things hum for June, don't you?" she asked. "And you're ready to help because June has not been any too nice to you and Marion. You're jealous of her clothes. Mabel, you ready for a lark?"

"I don't know," said Mabel somberly. "I'm getting fat again."

"I don't wonder," said May Hollins. "You're sleeping late again and eating too much ice cream and candy. Every morning now I have to go off by myself on a morning tramp or go with Miss Fielding. Miss Fielding says she is awfully sorry."

Mabel looked guilty.

"First I had to take in all my clothes," she said, "and now I have to rip out all the seams again to get 'em to go round me." She glanced over at a hammock in the glade where June Tuttle

was idly swinging a silken ankle and thrumming lightly on a guitar.

"Something about June Tuttle," she admitted, "makes me lazy."

"June Tuttle's a selfish pig," said Ellen curtly. "She told Miss Fielding she never plays her guitar to give pleasure to others. She plays it absolutely for herself."

"She's conceited too," flashed Edna Holmes, with the first fire that had been struck from her languid air of indolence for days. "She says she's always absolutely sure of herself — that nobody ever made a fool of her."

"Did she say that?" demanded Ellen.

Edna nodded.

Ellen narrowed her eyelids thoughtfully.

"Let's form a secret society," she said, "just so we can have the fun of initiating June. That's what I meant when I asked you if you were ready for a lark."

There was a general chorus of assent.

A little later Ellen strolled over and seated herself by June's hammock.

"June," she said, "why won't you join the Camp Fire Girls?"

"Not interested," yawned June. "It's plebeian, Ellen. I knew a crowd of Camp Fire Girls and they had to learn to wash dishes and all that sort of thing. Imagine *me* washing dishes!"

"I can't," said Ellen pertly. "Dish-washing is by far too sensible and substantial a diversion for a butterfly like you."

"Oh, you can't ruffle me," said June. "I'm always sure of myself. Hadn't you ever noticed that?"

"Didn't anybody ever made a fool of you?" asked Ellen adroitly.

"I should hope not," flashed June. "Dear me, Ellen, what a coarse question."

"I can make a fool of you," said Ellen. "Don't you believe it?"

"No," said June with an insolent toss of her head.

Ellen laughed. It was an unpleasant laugh that brought the color into June's satin-like skin.

"June Tuttle," demanded Ellen, "if I can make a fool of you just once — and make you lose that wonderful self-possession on which you pride yourself, will you join the Camp Fire Girls?"

"You can't do it," said June positively.

"Your sharp tongue doesn't bother me in the least, Ellen. It merely amuses me."

"Will you let me try?" insisted Ellen.

June looked doubtful, then reflecting that a refusal would indicate a certain lack of faith in her boasted power of self-possession, she nodded.

"It makes no difference to me," she said.

"And you'll honestly join if I succeed? But no, you wouldn't be game to make a wager like that."

"I wouldn't! Ellen Birch, if you think you can scare —"

"It's a bargain then?" interrupted Ellen, and June nodded disdainfully.

Ellen went on embroidering her Camp Fire robe. Late that night she held a whispered consultation with Mabel Wing. Since the episode of the green bug, oddly enough Mabel and Ellen had been better friends.

"I say, June," said Mabel lazily, the next day, "if you won't join the Camp Fire Girls, why don't you join 'The Independent Order of Doodlebugs'?"

"Great Scott," said June, sitting up in some astonishment. "What's the Independent Order of Doodlebugs, pray?"

"A society," said Mabel solemnly, "for the express purpose of eating — "

"I'll join," said June.

So it came about that June was escorted to a lonely spot in the forest late one afternoon to take the solemn oath of membership in the "Independent Order of Doodlebugs."

Daintily gowned and complacent, June suspected nothing of what was in store for her.

Ellen Birch withdrew to a thicket and taking two saucers from her blouse carefully blackened the under side of one with the smoke from a tallow candle. The other she left quite clean. Then joining the expectant group she gave June one saucer and kept the smokeless one for herself.

Utterly unaware that the under side was black, June took her saucer and inquired what it was for.

"June Tuttle," said Ellen dramatically, "you are now about to take the solemn oath of membership in the Independent Order of Doodlebugs. In taking this dread oath it is absolutely necessary that you keep your eyes on mine, never once permitting your glance to waver, that you do as I do and say whatever I say."

"Proceed," said June.

Passing one finger slowly around the bottom of the clean saucer, Ellen made a cross upon her cheek.

Eyes riveted intently upon Ellen's face, June did likewise. A jet cross appeared upon her cheek.

"I do solemnly swear," began Ellen, "that I will keep inviolate — "

"I do solemnly swear," said June, unaware of the sable decoration on her cheek or the commotion among the girls, "that I will keep — "

"The secrets of the Doodlebugs!" said Ellen with another mystic pass around the under side of the saucer.

June repeated the sentence word for word. Another smoky cross appeared upon the pink and white velvet of her complexion.

The girls shrieked with laughter. June, quite sure that the staginess of her attitude had aroused their humor, struck a more dramatic pose and kept her eyes fixed rigidly on Ellen.

"And I will abide by the rules." Ellen described a circle on her forehead and June scrupulously followed suit. Mabel Wing rolled over and over upon the grass in a fit of laughter.

"What's so funny?" demanded June. "Do I look like a Doodlebug?"

"Don't mind me," gasped Mabel hysterically. "I'm crazy. Go on, Ellen, go on. You're great."

Ellen improvised phrases and gestures until June's face was a study in black and white.

"Now," she said finally, "we will bury the saucer. That's something like burying the hatchet. Use your saucer to dig a hole — without looking!" she added sharply. June dug a hole. "Now pack the dirt over it firmly with your hands. Mabel, wipe the candidate's hands with your handkerchief, and all give her the clasp of fellowship."

Mabel wiped off the mingled dirt and soot stains; then they all gravely shook hands with her. Somebody suggested that they ride down to the village with Joe.

This suggestion met with a most enthusiastic reception at the hands of everyone but June.

"I really ought to write some letters home," she said.

There was a chorus of dissent.

"Oh, come on," said Marion Ralston. "It's warm and we'll all get sundaes at the drug store.

It wouldn't be a real Doodlebug initiation if we didn't go down and eat something."

June surrendered.

They waited for Joe at a bend in the lower road. He pulled up with a roar of laughter.

"Just been up to camp with the mail, young ladies," he said, "and Miss Fielding's been wonderin' where ye'd all got to." He glanced furtively at June's besmeared countenance. "Reckon," he said, with a chuckle, "reckon ye been up to some devilment, ain't ye!"

"Joe," said Mabel Wing severely, "what in the world are you laughing at? We're merely going down to the village."

With a rattle of wheels and many a chuckle from Joe, the wagon with its cargo of girls rolled on toward the village.

By the time Joe drove up to the drug store, the girls were shaking with laughter. June looked puzzled.

"What's so funny this afternoon?" she demanded. "Everybody looks at us just once and begins to laugh. And what were those boys yelling after us?"

"Seems like they said somethin' about a tar-

baby," said Joe slyly. "But there hain't much sense in that. Goin' to walk back, young ladies, or am I to take ye back?"

"Better take us back," said Mabel, "or we'll be late for supper. We're late now."

The girls filed into the drug store and laughing a great deal more than the occasion seemed to warrant, seated themselves along the counter.

The clerk smiled. Then he laughed.

June Tuttle, glancing carelessly into a mirror behind the counter, suddenly clapped her hands over her face and shrieked in horrified realization.

"Ellen Birch!" she cried, wild with anger, "it was that saucer. I know it was. How could you. I'll never forgive you as long as I live. You've made a perfect fool of me —"

Something suspiciously familiar in the sound of the words made her halt.

"Well," said Ellen, "I said I would, didn't I? And I have. You're the laughing stock of the town. And it's up to you to keep your side of the agreement."

Thus, unwillingly enough, June Tuttle became a Camp Fire Girl.

CHAPTER X

AN INTERRUPTED INITIATION

June Tuttle felt a stealthy hand upon her shoulder.

"Wake up," whispered a voice in her ear.

Startled, June sat up, to find a group of girls outside her tent in night-dresses. They all seemed excited and expectant.

"What's up?" she demanded, mindful of a similar visit. "Is Mabel Wing snoring again? If she is — I can't help it. I'm not going over there again to-night — "

"Sh!" whispered Mabel Wing herself, coming forward with a lantern. "Don't make any noise. We're off on a night-gown frolic."

"Where to?" asked June drowsily.

"Oh, anywhere," said Mabel vaguely. "Somewhere in the woods."

"Don't want to go," said June, covering herself up comfortably again.

"June Tuttle," said Mabel solemnly, "if you

don't go along we'll drench your bed with lake water. Don't be a spoilsport. Every single girl in camp's going."

June sighed.

"Wait till I get my shoes," she said. "My, but it's a ghostly hour."

"That's what we're going to have — a ghost party," said Mabel. "And no shoes. The orders are bare feet and night-dresses. We've got a lot of stuff to eat and we're going — 'into the forest primeval, where the whispering pines and the hemlocks' — or whatever it is, will hide us from Miss Fielding's eyes. We're all scared to death but it's heaps of fun."

June glanced at the dark line of the forest above which a late moon hung.

"It — it looks pretty dark over there," she quavered.

"It is dark," said Mabel sternly; "deliciously, daringly, darksomely dark. I glory in it, though I'm scared stiff. My feet are so fat they pick up pebbles and keep 'em. You've got to come anyway, June Tuttle, for the whole party's just in celebration of your joining the Camp Fire Girls."

"Funny way to celebrate," said June. "You

nearly scared me to death hissing ' Wake up! ' like that in my ear."

" Come on," threatened Ellen Birch, for June looked drowsy again, " or I'll drop wet pebbles down your back."

June rose with alacrity.

The camp was very quiet. The lap of the lake came queerly through the still night air. There was an orchestra of night insects strumming weirdly on the farther shores. There was no sound in Miss Fielding's tent. A gentle snore floated now and then from Nora's. The sole other sound was the restless walk of Maude, the camp-horse, as she moved discontentedly about in eternal dispute with her halter.

Shivering with delicious fear, the girls slipped noiselessly out of camp and on through the forest.

" My, but it's dark! " said Ida Holmes. " Let's go on until we find a nice moonlit spot. I — I'd hate to eat in the dark, wouldn't you, Edna? "

" I'm not in the least afraid," said Edna, but she glanced furtively to right and left as they hurried on.

" I'm simply starving to death," said Mabel Wing. " It's the fearful responsibility of getting

everybody up without waking Miss Fielding. Ellen was hardest of all. She threw a shoe at me."

"Let's have a ghost dance," said Marion Ralston gleefully, and setting down the lantern and baskets, they joined hands and danced, still near enough to camp to find courage in the glimmer of the tents through the trees.

The dance at an end, giggling and breathless they went deeper into the forest.

"Don't — don't go over that way," whispered Ida Holmes fearfully. "There — there's an old hut over there — don't you remember, Edna? Joe says it's haunted by an old man with whiskers — and that — that if we ever see him we mustn't stop running, for he's an evil spirit."

The girls looked at each other in affrighted dismay.

"Silly youngster!" said Edna. "There's no such thing as ghosts." But her voice lacked conviction.

"Miss Fielding did say we'd better keep away from it," said May Hollins, shuddering. "I heard her tell you too, Edna. She's spoken of it several times."

"Let's go back," said Marion Ralston.

"Go back!" exploded Mabel Wing. "Go back! I'd like to see myself. If you think for one minute, Marion Ralston, that I'm going back after setting my alarm clock and letting my pillow explode under my ear in that dreadful way I never get used to no matter how often I do it — why you're crazy! And didn't I sit up last night making sandwiches with the tent closed and warm as could be, and didn't I carve a slice off my thumb with Ellen's pen-knife just hacking at that funny ham Joe brought? I've got everything planned for a ghost party and a ghost party we're going to have."

Spurred on by Mabel's sudden tone of courage, they filed on through the forest.

"There's a moonlit spot over there," said June Tuttle. "See, where the trees are thin. It's a sort of clearing. Can't we go over there? What have we got to eat?"

"Sandwiches and lemons and lemon sticks and pickles," said Ellen Birch. "Joe got them all for us."

"Joe's a wonderful man," said Mabel Wing with decision. "He got that stringy ham. I think

it must be pretty old ham, for we had to hack at it terribly to get chunks off. Joe can buy most anything you ask him to — even an alarm clock or a green bug."

As the moonlit spot of clearing loomed closer, the girls in a panic raced wildly into it.

Mabel lumbered over the ground like a frightened animal.

"You know," she whispered, "that was exactly like a dark cellar stairs to me. You feel terribly brave when you start up and you think maybe your courage is going to last, when all of a sudden you wonder what you'd do if somebody grabbed your foot from behind, and — My! — how you do race up the last two or three steps. That's the way I felt. I was scared stiff. Ellen, you brought a cloth in your basket, didn't you? Spread it out here. It's sort of dark and I'd hate to eat a bug."

Gaining courage in the moonlight, the girls unpacked the baskets. Watching them, one might have seen better team work than a similar party would have evoked earlier in the summer. There were occasional spasms of good-fellowship in Pine-Tree Camp and to-night was one of them. Every hand helped.

"Miss Fielding thinks we're all in bed," exclaimed May Hollins, munching a dill pickle. "Aren't we the terrors, though!"

Huddled together about the square of white, the ghost party partook of sandwiches, it drew shiveringly sour lemon juice through porous sticks of candy, it luxuriated over great, juicy dill pickles and shivered once in a while when the breeze grew a little cool or somebody told a ghost story.

Mabel Wing satisfied the pangs of hunger aroused by the excitement of the night and unexpectedly fell asleep. There was considerable difficulty in rousing her.

"Wouldn't it be perfectly dreadful," said May Hollins alarmed, "if she just went on sleeping and we had to carry her into camp."

"We couldn't," said Ida. "We'd have to form a circle around her and guard her all night."

"I'm awake," said Mabel as unexpectedly as she'd gone to sleep. "If you poke me with that twig again, June Tuttle, I'll likely bite your eye out." She rose yawning. "Now for the rest of the program."

"What rest?" inquired June Tuttle.

"Your initiation," said Mabel, the satisfaction

in her tone tinged with the memory of the insistent twig with which June had awakened her.

"Initiation!" said June indignantly. "Not much. Wasn't I initiated into the 'Independent Order of Doodlebugs' just a couple of days ago and am I likely to forget it?"

"This is slightly different," explained Mabel. "There's more dignity to it. We simply have to initiate you before you'll be a real Camp Fire Girl, don't we, Marion?"

Marion nodded and opened a basket. It seemed to contain various mysterious accessories to the initiation.

Mabel blindfolded her victim while Ellen and Edna held her arms and tied them behind her with a rope. It was quite in vain for June to protest. Bound and blindfolded, she had to make the best of it.

"Now, Ellen," said Mabel, "heat the branding iron in the lantern."

Ellen produced a curling iron from the basket and grinning elfishly proceeded to heat it over the blaze of the lantern.

"Is it hot?" demanded Mabel.

"Just what are you lunatics going to do?" asked June anxiously.

There was a general snicker.

Ellen disinterred a wet rag from the basket and laid the curling thongs against it. They sizzled threateningly.

"Hear that, June Tuttle?" demanded Mabel in awful accents. "That is the iron with which we brand you forever."

The lantern flickered, the iron grew hotter. Ellen sizzled it against the wet rag again and again with keen enjoyment. June writhed apprehensively. Heaven alone knew what such a spiteful elf as Ellen might do, given the opportunity. June did not relish being bound and blindfolded, with the iron hissing forth promises of discomfort.

Mabel with a broad grin made a sign to Ida Holmes, who rummaged busily in the basket and produced a Thermos bottle. From the bottle she drew a small piece of ice.

"Did it last all right?" asked Mabel in the deaf and dumb alphabet.

"There's not a very big piece left," whispered May Hollins, pointing. "But I guess it will do."

"And now, June Tuttle," triumphed Mabel

aloud, "prepare thyself for the Burning Iron. Ready! Go!"

Extremes of heat and cold are similar in feeling. Ellen sizzled the curling thongs against the wet cloth, with realistic effect, in the vicinity of June's ear. Marion, at the same instant, clapped the piece of ice to June's forehead. The victim screamed wildly.

"Oh!" she cried indignantly, "that isn't funny at all, Mabel Wing. You're going too far. I — I can smell my hair burning and the skin's all off my forehead."

There was a stifled hum of laughter; then the blindfold was removed and Marion, laughing, held up the piece of ice.

June flatly refused to credit the giggled explanation.

"You can't tell me that," she said, "for you couldn't possibly burn my hair with a piece of ice. And you did burn it. I smelled it." And then when the chorus of proof persisted: "Well, I'm flabbergasted. That ridiculous little piece of ice nearly scared me to death. Ellen Birch, you must have thought of that. Nobody else would!"

"Now," said Mabel, who appeared to be master

of ceremonies, "now for the next ordeal. Girls, take the lantern and hunt up all the brush and sticks you can find, and a dead log or so. Come on, June, you can help. Now we'll fix 'em in piles — some a little distance apart and some further."

"Just what *is* this stunt?" demanded June.

"We call it an obstacle test," said Mabel. "You're to step over each pile and measure the steps between. Then we blindfold you and you have to go over it again. And if your toe so much as touches a single heap of brush after you're blindfolded, woe is you! You will forthwith be drenched with this can of wet and chilly water."

The night was growing a little chilly. June shivered at the thought of a drenched night-dress.

"You mean I have to climb over all that stuff blindfolded and never touch it?" asked June blankly. "Caesar's ghost, Mabel, it can't be done."

"Others have done it," chanted Mabel in sepulchral accents. "Have a care, June Tuttle. Measure each intervening distance as you value your life."

Very gingerly June climbed over the piles of brush and counted the steps between.

"Let me do it again," she pleaded. "I've simply got to remember where that dead log is and I have to step fearfully high to get over that biggest pile of brush. Who invented this obstacle test anyway?"

"No matter!" said Mabel in graveyard tones. "Thou art destined to climb over these things and thou must be prepared."

"Let's see," said June earnestly. "It's five good steps from the log to that big pile of brush — and then eight to the next — and six to the next — Mabel Wing, I'll never be able to remember!"

"Ellen," said Mabel significantly, "is the can of water ready?"

June went over the row of obstacles again.

Now when it came time to replace June's blindfold, it proved a troublesome task. Mabel was so long about it that June grew impatient.

"I'll forget those steps," she said, "while you're fussing over that bandage. Do hurry."

Ellen, who had been scurrying wildly around with the others removing every obstacle from June's path, signaled Mabel that the way was clear, and instantly June's bandage was adjusted.

"There," said Mabel, "you're ready. Remember the can of water."

"Won't it be funny?" whispered May Hollins with a giggle. "She'll think all that stuff will be in her way and it won't be and she'll step high — and count — over empty ground. Ida, I — I do believe I'll die of laughing."

"Sh!" hissed Ellen. "Here she comes."

June began her ridiculous obstacle parade over obstacles that were no longer there. Her caution was excessive. She took great high steps, counted aloud, forgot where the log ought to be and groaned.

"I can't go on," she said once. "I simply can't. I don't remember whether that next pile of stuff was big or little."

Convulsed with laughter the girls looked on.

"Take a big step," advised Ellen, "and it will do for either a big pile or a little one."

"Remember, oh, remember," boomed Mabel, "that chilly can of water."

June shivered and stepped very high. Very laboriously she finished the test and wrenched off the blindfold.

The path was clear! June stared.

"We moved 'em all," chuckled Mabel. "Oh, June, you were a scream."

And then in the very midst of the general outburst of laughter, something happened that froze them all into statues of horror.

From the bushes to the east came a stealthy rustling!

"D-d-d-did you hear anything, Ellen?" demanded Mabel Wing.

"Ye — es," said Ellen, her poise gone, "I did. A — a sort of rustling like someone sneaking along in the bushes."

"Oh — oh, what shall we do, what shall we do?" whimpered May Hollins. "I'm scared to death."

Ida began to cry.

"I — I said we ought not come," she said, drawing a long breath. "I — I was fearfully afraid all the time."

The girls huddled together in a frightened group.

Again came the stealthy rustling, more prolonged this time. Someone was creeping slowly but surely toward the moonlit space strewn with

the relics of the ghost picnic and June's initiation.

"Maybe," whispered Ellen, "it's a tramp and he's been attracted by the sight of food. Wouldn't it be well to speak up if it is and — and tell him he can have it all if he'll just let us go?"

"I'll try," said Mabel Wing gulping. "Likely I'll faint before I finish a sentence, but — but I'll try."

There was an electric interval of silence.

"If — if you're a tramp," began Mabel hoarsely.

"Oh, don't say that," gasped May Hollins. "You — you might insult him."

"If — if you're anybody," began Mabel again, her voice becoming somewhat thin and quavery, "and — and you want this food on the ground here, you're welcome to it, though there's nothing left but — but pickles and sandwiches — "

There was no answer.

"Maybe he's deaf and dumb," said Marion Ralston shuddering.

"Or the ghost from the haunted hut," put in May Hollins. "Oh, Mabel, I'm scared to death."

"Be quiet," ordered Mabel; then suddenly: "Girls! he's coming closer. I'm going to run for

it!" With a wild shriek the girls gathered their night-dresses about their feet and bolted off into the forest. Mabel brought up the rear, panting.

"Don't run so fast," she begged. "I — I can't keep up! O-o-o-h!"

With a wild groan Mabel fell headlong over a pile of brush.

The girls on ahead heard her scream.

"We've got to go back and see if she's hurt," said Ida. "She's too fat to run."

Then they halted thunderstruck and stared at each other. For Mabel was laughing. Peal after peal of hysterical laughter floated toward them through the shadows.

"She's lost her mind," said May. "I always thought Mabel was too fat to be healthy."

"We've got to go back this minute," said Ida.

They found Mabel sprawling on a heap of brush. She was still laughing.

"Look what scared us!" she gasped. "Over there by the bushes."

Trembling they all looked.

Two hairy ears and a pair of mild eyes were peering over the bushes at Mabel.

It was Maude, the camp-horse, off for one of her truant excursions in the forest.

"She's chewed her halter again," gasped Ellen. "Come on, girls, we've got to get her."

Giggling in hysterical relief, they cautiously closed in upon Her Gentle Highness, Maude. Ellen seized the halter rope and led. Mabel brought up the rear with a huge stick and whenever Maude betrayed a tendency to linger drowsily by the wayside — and sometimes when she didn't — Mabel thumped her mildly over the flank and made her snort in aggrieved surprise.

"She needs it, giddy old thing," said Mabel indignantly. "She's always escaping in the night or some other disgraceful hour. And she nearly scared me stiff."

Thus the ghost-party filed on through the forest, dragging Maude.

It was very dark now; the moon had disappeared behind a bank of clouds. A spatter of rain filtered through the leaves.

"It's thundering too," whispered Edna. "Miss Fielding will go around telling the girls to get ready for storm, and she'll find we're gone. We'll never get back without her knowing."

"Let's hope for the best," said Mabel. "Ellen, pull Maude a little harder. She's backing up. She's got less sense than any horse I ever saw."

Ellen pulled, Maude snorted — and Mabel thumped her once again. Greatly frightened now, with the moon gone and storm coming, they hurried back to camp to find their worst expectations verified. Miss Fielding and Nora were both up. The girls watched their lanterns bobbing around among the tents, and stared at each other in dismay.

"What'll we do," mourned Mabel. "It's all up. She knows we're gone."

"Just walk in," said Ellen. "We can't do anything else. I'd sooner be scolded anyway than stand here in the rain."

Mabel thumped Maude again and the ghost-party filed sheepishly into camp, looking very downcast and bedraggled.

"Here they come now, Miss Katherine," called Nora, "and they've rounded up that haythen, Maude."

Miss Fielding held her lantern high and stared at Maude's crestfallen escort. There was a great relief in her eyes.

"Girls," she said, "you've nearly frightened me to death. Nora, take Maude back and tie her up. Mabel, you can give her a good thump for me. She's a fearful responsibility."

Which Mabel did with a vengeance, chiefly because she was guilty and embarrassed and didn't know what else to do.

Miss Fielding glanced keenly at the bedraggled ghost-brigade.

"Tell me," she said, "did you go out purposely to look for Maude — or was it just a lark?"

There was an embarrassed interval of silence. Then Ellen spoke.

"Miss Fielding," she said, "we — we went out on a night-gown lark and — and Maude nearly scared us to death and it began to rain and Mabel fell down — and we've all torn our night-dresses and got splinters in our toes — "

"Into warm, dry night-dresses, every one of you, this instant!" commanded Miss Fielding. "Extra blankets and not a sound in camp until nine to-morrow morning."

Silently one by one the ghosts departed.

"Miss Fielding *is* a brick," said Marion Ral-

ston, "I — I thought she'd scold and I wouldn't have blamed her."

"I guess she was worried," said Ellen, "and it *was* sort of silly. My, but I'm glad to get into bed."

And from the night of the ghost-party on, Miss Fielding's hold upon the girls was stronger.

CHAPTER XI

THE ROBBERY

"Help!" shrieked June Tuttle excitedly. "Help!"

The girls piled wildly out of bed.

"What in the world is the matter with June?" exclaimed Ellen Birch, leaping out of bed. "A snake must have bitten her."

An instant later the sound of the camp-gong rang furiously through the morning air.

June was out under the trees in her night-dress, wildly beating the gong with a crooked stick.

Her face was white and staring.

"Help!" she wailed. "I've been robbed. Oh, girls, my clothes are all gone!"

"What's the trouble, June?" asked Miss Fielding, emerging from her tent in astonishment at the general uproar.

"Oh, Miss Fielding," gasped the girl hysterically, "my — my trunks have been rifled and all my dresses are gone — every single one — and they were beauties! I went to look for my serge

dress just a while ago and I — I haven't a single gown left — only shoes and stockings and things like that."

"You're sure!" said Miss Fielding, aghast.

"Positive," said June, her teeth chattering. "The only thing left is that — that Camp Fire thing you hung up in my tent the first day I was here and I — I've never had that on."

Moved by a common impulse of alarm, Edna and Marion fled to their own trunks and screamed. They too were empty.

"My dresses are all gone, too!" cried Edna hoarsely.

Instantly there was a furore of excitement. The girls bolted wildly in and out of tents, opening and shutting trunks, talking and calling back and forth in hysterical voices.

"I haven't a dress left," cried Marion Ralston. "Isn't it terrible? And May's dresses are all gone, too."

"So are mine," shrieked Mabel Wing, dropping her trunk lid with a bang. "Oh, girls, maybe the thief's still in camp under a bed or in a trunk — " and Mabel straightway proceeded to complicate things considerably by going into hys-

terics. The girls gathered about her helplessly. Mabel wept and laughed and ended with a wild shriek that scared Maude, the camp-horse, into a spasmodic jump.

By this time the girls were all a little hysterical.

"Mabel," said Miss Fielding, "you'll have to compose yourself or you'll be ill. Come on, girls; we'll leave Mabel quite to herself while we go carefully over each tent and see what's gone."

It soon became evident that the camp's robber had been chiefly interested in dresses. Nothing else was gone. Save the blouses and bloomers and the rough and ready attire which the girls had discarded on June's arrival, there was not a dress in camp.

"And the robbers wouldn't take these, I suppose," said Edna bitterly, holding up her Camp Fire blouse and bloomers, "because they weren't worth stealing."

"They must have sneaked in while we were off on the ghost-party," ventured Ida.

Miss Fielding looked puzzled.

"It's queer," she said thoughtfully. "I didn't hear a single sound, did you, Nora?"

"Not a sound," said Nora glibly, "save the

sound of that haythen Maude digging dirt up wid her heels."

"When I heard the thunder," went on Miss Fielding, frowning, "I got up to warn the girls. . . . The things must certainly have been gone then."

"Just — just think," cried Ida with a shudder; "maybe we passed the thief in the forest. O-o-o-h, how terrible!"

"Must have been more than one," said Ellen Birch. "One man couldn't have carried all those dresses, could he, Miss Fielding?"

"I shouldn't think so," said Miss Fielding. "I — I can't understand it at all."

The girls collected in a shivering knot. It was raining a little now.

"Better get into your Camp Fire suits," said Miss Fielding suddenly, "or you'll get cold. Nora, is breakfast ready?"

"Yes'm," said Nora. "Breakfast's been ready, this half hour."

Breakfast was merely a time of further excitement. The ghost-party, Maude's escapade, the storm of the night before, had all keyed the girls

up to an unusual pitch of excitement. Now with a camp robber to discuss, the excitement knew no bounds.

"What shall we do?" demanded June Tuttle, wringing her hands. "What *shall* we do? I haven't a single decent thing to wear."

"I'm going down to the village and telegraph my father," said Marion Ralston. "I can't think of anything else to do."

"But — but we can't go down to the village like this," said June with a disdainful glance at the rough blouse she was wearing.

"What's the reason you can't?" snapped Ellen Birch. "I can."

The girls fell silent.

"What would a robber want with dresses anyway?" wailed Mabel Wing, gulping down some very hot coffee that brought the tears to her eyes. "My clothes wouldn't fit anybody but a fat lady in a circus."

"He can sell them," said Edna. "I spent weeks and weeks planning those dresses."

"So did I," said Marion soberly.

June Tuttle began to cry.

"It's this horrid old camp," she said. "I — I hated it from the very first. I — I didn't want to come and my father made me."

"So did mine," flashed Edna. "And some of my loveliest frocks I've torn on those horrid old brambles in the forest."

"What did you lose, Miss Fielding?" asked June.

"Nothing," said Miss Fielding. "I have only camp things with me and I'm afraid they wouldn't attract the most enterprising thief."

"Mesilf," spoke up Nora, who was baking flapjacks, "I lost wan fine string o' green beads, emeralds they were, I'm thinkin' — they did be shinin' so. And they're missin' this mornin'."

There was a suppressed titter at Nora's loss; then June Tuttle spoke again.

"I wonder why thieves would pick out a camp to rob!" she exclaimed.

"They don't as a rule," said Miss Fielding. "Once in a while a tramp will rob the food supplies, but even that doesn't happen often. I'm afraid your wonderful gowns must have made some chance straggler in the forest covetous."

"I did be seein' an old man spyin' around here,

not a day since," said Nora, " and I shooed him off wid a broom."

It was a melancholy crowd of girls who finally rode down to the village with Joe to telegraph home. They wore Camp Fire blouses and rough skirts, of which Miss Fielding had seemed to have an endless supply.

" I just hope my father wires me to come straight home," said June Tuttle with a toss of her head. " And I — I don't care whether you like it or not, *I* think it's very queer that Miss Fielding was the only one in camp last night when the robbery happened and she hasn't lost a single thing. Even Nora lost something."

" Shame! " cried Ellen Birch, her eyes flashing fire. " June Tuttle, how dare you say such a thing? "

" Well, who knows who she is? " demanded June insolently. " She's just paid to manage our camp, isn't she? And servants have been known to steal before — "

But there was such a storm of indignant rebuke from all the others that June flushed and looked away.

" I — I didn't say she did take them, did I? "

she asked sullenly. "I said it looked queer. And who ever heard of a camp being robbed of clothes and nothing else?"

"Nobody ever heard of such clothes in camp as you girls brought, anyway," snapped Ellen tartly. "Serves you right."

Joe, whistling softly, drew up at the station. There was a curious twinkle in his eyes that he took care to veil from his passengers.

Ellen, who always seemed to have a natural bent for planning, wrote a form telegram which they all duplicated.

It read: "Camp robbed last night of all our dresses. We've nothing but Camp Fire blouses and skirts to wear. What shall we do?"

Now most of the girls had counted upon considerable sympathy and advice from home.

The advice came plentifully. There was not quite so much sympathy as the girls had hoped.

"I'm sorry you were foolish enough to take all those silly gowns with you," wrote June's father. "I wrote you to ship them home when you left the house-party. I've been asking about the Camp Fire rig and it sounds pretty sensible to me. It's

just the outfit for a girl who intends to rough it all summer and that's what I want you to do. Get Miss Fielding to write for plenty of Camp Fire clothes. I guess they'll see you through the summer."

The consensus of paternal opinion was pretty much the same.

Edna desperately telegraphed her father that she wanted to come home — that the robbery had made her so nervous she couldn't sleep. Mr. Holmes merely telegraphed Miss Fielding to have Joe spend his nights in camp as official protector.

The excitement of the robbery gradually died away. Only once did it blaze up brightly again.

Ellen, tramping homeward through the forest, found a string of green beads tangled in a bush.

"Nora," she said that night, "are these your beads?"

Nora changed color.

"I — I do believe they're me emeralds," she said. "Where did ye be findin' 'em, Miss Ellen?"

"Not very far from the haunted hut," said Ellen.

Nora gasped.

"Miss Fielding told ye not to be goin' near that place," she said sharply. "Didn't ye, Miss Fielding?"

"Yes," said Miss Fielding, "I did indeed. I wish you wouldn't, Ellen." She looked worried.

Late that night Ellen spoke of the green beads to Marion.

"Seems to me Nora acted sort of queer when I gave her back her beads," she said. "What did you think?"

"I didn't notice," said Marion sleepily.

"And I'd like to know just what there is about that haunted hut that makes Miss Fielding look so worried. She isn't silly enough to believe in ghosts — think so, Marion?"

"Dry up," said Marion; "I'm sleepy."

"Well," said Ellen keenly, "all I've got to say is that there's some mystery afoot and I'd like to get at the bottom of it. Who robbed the camp? Who was the old man Nora shooed off with a broom? Why did Joe look so mysterious the other day when I asked him about the ghost in the hut? Why did Nora act so queer over her green beads to-night? And just why does Miss Fielding look

worried every time she hears of a girl going near that hut? ''

'' Sherlock Holmes! '' jeered Marion. '' Go to sleep.''

And in her own tent Katherine Fielding glanced at the star-jeweled sky above the lake. She was very wakeful.

'' I can't believe Nora is anything but honest,'' she said, '' and yet — and yet how queerly she acted to-night when Ellen returned her beads. And I can't forget that she was up and dressed the night of the robbery and seemed embarrassed when I found her so. To be sure, she said she was going out to find Maude, and likely she was, but — ''

She moved restlessly and glanced at the single pine to the west, showing darkly against the night sky.

'' But blessings on that camp-robber! '' she breathed devoutly. '' He was more of a real philanthropist than he'll ever know! ''

But in that Miss Fielding was mistaken.

CHAPTER XII

ANOTHER LETTER

Slowly Pine-Tree Camp slid back into the routine of Camp Fire work it had begun to enjoy before the arrival of June Tuttle and her disturbing array of clothes. Thanks to Ellen Birch, whose initiation trick had made of June a Camp Fire Girl; thanks to the mysterious robber who had eliminated the greatest element of discord from the camp with curious timeliness; thanks to the infinite tact and patience of Katherine Fielding, the fretful days of unrest and jealousy were changing to busy days of Camp Fire work. There was a new ring of authority in Miss Fielding's voice, a kindly authority born of confidence in herself and her charges.

"Now that my hated rival is gone," she wrote jubilantly to her unknown correspondent, "— and you can't imagine what a powerful rival to the Camp Fire spirit fashionable clothes may be! — there is a wonderful change of atmosphere here in Pine-Tree Camp. Blessings on the robber!

The whole atmosphere somehow is clearer and sweeter, as if we had had a thundershower and the sun had come out again. Now that the girls may not dress and preen themselves in the long afternoons like so many envious peacocks, they look to me more for entertainment. And how willingly I supply that you can guess! Every afternoon now we embroider our ceremonial robes and I tell the girls Indian legends and sing them Indian songs.

"It is surprising how genuinely interested most of them seem — how much too they seem to enjoy those quiet hours under the trees. Before, you know, when my fashionable little ladies were dressed in their finery, there was a wall of defiance and hostility about them that I could not break through. They were insolent grand ladies, of course, and a grand lady in a very grand gown can't sit on a carpet of pine needles under a tree and listen to folklore. She'd likely ruin her gown and she couldn't and wouldn't sew — dear no! It wouldn't be fashionable and June Tuttle would laugh!

"But June Tuttle — thank fortune! — has lost her sway! Since Ellen tricked her into a somewhat grudging membership, now that her exquisite

gowns are gone, her word is no longer law. Moreover, just a little of her air of assurance has departed with her gowns. Now she is just a haughty, discontented, spoiled youngster to whom Edna clings as a kindred spirit. And the others, finding at last what a good time we may all have in camp if we only try, blithely follow me and ignore June and Edna.

"Clothes were undoubtedly the chief cause of the bickering and jealousy in camp. Now that they are gone the girls are so much easier to manage. Of course, after the robbery there was much discontent and rebellion, many vows of eternal vengeance against the blessed robber, many flashes of resentment toward unsympathetic parents who flatly refused — bless them! — to replenish the summer wardrobes; but one by one the girls — even June and Edna — resigned themselves to the Camp Fire blouse and bloomers, and the change is miraculous. Without that jealousy born of a desire to outshine each other I catch glimpses of real girlishness and for that I am truly thankful. There have been times when I wondered if indeed there were any normal, fun-loving hearts among the girls in Pine-Tree Camp. The burning

of the trunk of chocolate peppermints, the initiation and the ghost-frolic have revealed a spark of good-fellowship too that I shall fan into a flame.

" For all I daily bless our robber, still I do puzzle greatly over the whole occurrence. It was so timely — so mysteriously a real Godsend — as if indeed he knew and thought to help me! And he didn't steal a single real essential — only luxuries. It is very odd.

" Once more Mabel has begun to set her alarm clock. Save June and Edna we rise with the sun and take a long, healthy tramp through the forest. Once more Mabel lost a pound and wildly telegraphed home. I have reorganized the swimming class that June's arrival so completely demoralized and the girls splash about the lake in real delight. I am teaching them some water games.

" Mabel learned to swim with astonishing ease and then indeed her pounds literally began to disappear. May Hollins was terribly afraid of the water, but Mabel absolutely governs her in a wholly lazy-good-humored way and May shiveringly had to do as she said. Indeed, the first day Mabel deliberately dragged the poor little kiddie in and ducked her. Only June and Edna hold

themselves studiously aloof from the fun and energy that are raging at last in my camp. Ellen Birch I find an invaluable ally. She is tireless and alive with electric vitality. Still her sharp tongue provokes many a quarrel. May Hollins, thanks to the severe health discipline imposed upon her daily by Mabel Wing, grows rosier and healthier. Her people I'm sure will never know her. The fresh air, the abstinence from candy, the long walks, the open air nights, the forest life in general, were bound to help her. Ida, with her sweet, shy sympathy, somehow holds the girls together. She helps me amazingly. Thus, if I suggest something that entails almost as much labor as it does fun, and the girls look blank, she is the first to slip her hand in mine and volunteer. And the first recruit of course is the hardest to get. Enthusiasm is contagious. Ellen Birch usually volunteers next and then the girls are won. If there's real work in it, Mabel Wing is usually the last, unless she's quite sure she'll lose a pound or so, and then her enthusiasm is boundless.

"We're learning a great deal of weather lore — just now, the meaning of clouds and winds and temperature. We're keeping scientific records.

There are brown honor beads ahead for the girls who learn the weather lore well.

"Just now Mabel is laboriously hacking at a huge stick of wood. She's developed a taste for carpentry since she's learned that it may reduce her arms and that she may win some green handcraft honor beads as well. I don't know what she's making, but her round face is fairly scarlet with enthusiasm. May is very near making a basket. Ida and Ellen and Marion are splashing about in the lake and June and Edna are listlessly watching. They are the one element of indolence in a charming picture. We are progressing splendidly!"

CHAPTER XIII

MARION RALSTON

The most singular change the lack of fashionable clothes had made was the change in Marion Ralston. With the loss of her brilliant feathers the girl's passion for leadership seemed to wane. Before, she had hotly contested the most trivial point of rivalry with Edna, she had striven proudly to be recognized as the acknowledged leader of her set. Now somehow she was quiet and indifferent and watched the active leadership of the Camp Fire Girls revert to Ellen Birch. A new brightly-colored gown had always stimulated Marion to a feverish vivacity and a sort of airy defiance. Now Miss Fielding frequently found her with her chin resting on her hands, dreamily studying the gorgeous afterglow of a sunset or the purple of a hill. It was quite impossible to arouse or interest her. Her thoughts seemed always miles away.

"Brightly-colored clothes," decided Miss Fielding, "must have been her sole interest in life

and now they're gone, she's indifferent to everything else. And unless I am greatly mistaken she was Edna's rival only in dressing. She hasn't the faintest desire to lead in anything else."

Curiously enough, however, Marion was gentler and more likable now that she was not quite so nervously vivacious. Marion Ralston, striving selfishly to prove her brilliancy as a leader of fashion, was self-conscious and a little haughty. Marion Ralston, quite herself, was charming. She contributed a tranquil note to the growing harmony.

"She's more natural in every way," decided Miss Fielding, "but she puzzles me, she's so dreamy and indifferent. Still, it isn't the insolent indifference of June and Edna. It's a good-humored indifference. She swims and tramps with the girls willingly enough, but with absolutely no enthusiasm. If I could only find the key, I fancy there's a veritable treasure of enthusiasm somewhere within her. She's that sort. A girl who could be so vivacious at times must be keen and alert. Lack of resource has made her sluggish. She needs to find herself."

Thereafter Miss Fielding fell to watching

Marion intently. She saw how the girl's fine eyes flashed when she caught the brilliant colors of a sunset; how she watched the storms play over the lake with a peculiar tensity of interest; how the dreaminess followed the electric flash and made her thoughtful and preoccupied.

"Isn't the sunset wonderful to-night, Marion?" she said one afternoon.

Marion drew a long breath.

"Miss Fielding," she said, "it — it's simply wonderful. It's so beautiful it fairly hurts."

So that was it! Miss Fielding glanced kindly at the vivid, lovely face of the girl she had not understood.

"Color excites her," she reflected; "yes, that's it — it must be. I wonder I hadn't thought of it before. She loves brilliant colors, and the vivid gowns were only a means of expression. There's something — something inner there striving for the proper medium of expression. Clothes aren't the thing, of course — but she seized upon them as the one thing she could bend to the instinctive expression of something she doesn't understand herself. The excitement of color explains her

feverish vivacity when she wore a gay, new gown. Surely that passionate love of color must be the key to something worth while — and surely if she finds the proper medium with which to express it, clothes won't bother her at all. She'll just have a wholesome interest in them and nothing else."

"You love color, don't you?" she said aloud.

"Love it!" flashed Marion, her dreaminess gone. "Miss Fielding, it — it's just life to me. Mother always scolds because I'm so wild about bright gowns, but — but if I can't have bright colors about — I keep thinking of all the wonderful colors I've seen and where I've seen them — and yet if I do have them around me, it makes me restless and queer and my brain fairly burns —" her dark, pretty face glowed with enthusiasm. What lay deep in Marion's heart, Miss Fielding wondered: the soul of a poet or a painter? There was a curious fertility here that might blossom into much.

Miss Fielding unslung a field glass from her shoulder and pointed toward the forest.

"Look," she exclaimed, "there's color for you, Marion. See that bird; he's as scarlet as a winged

flame. And watch the crows sailing toward the forest. By contrast our flaming little friend glows like a vivid coal."

Marion adjusted the glasses and caught her breath.

"Why," she exclaimed radiantly, "he's wonderful, Miss Fielding. Tell me about him."

"He's part of the brilliant color with which Nature fairly teems if we look for it," said Miss Fielding pleasantly. "Birds and butterflies, flowers and grasses, why, there is a veritable rainbow of color in the summer world if one's eyes are sharp. Our little friend over there is a scarlet tanager and his golden-winged neighbor is a flicker. See him, Marion?"

"Yes," said the girl. "I never realized you could see so well through a field glass."

"One gesture," nodded Miss Fielding, "adds quite another vivid world to your vision, doesn't it? Do you like birds, Marion?"

"I never thought much about them."

"Why not go with me to-morrow and inspect some of these brightly feathered little folk who dwell so close to us in the forest. Would you like to?"

"I'd love it," said the girl simply.

The woods were vocal with the call of many birds when, upon the following day, Miss Fielding and Marion set forth with field glass and note book upon a bird-hunt through the quiet woods. There was the whir and flash of wings among the trees — now red — now gold — now marked in black and white — and far off in the golden gloom of the forest came the clear, sweet piping of the robins.

"I'd like to have you keep a record of the birds we see. Would you like to do that, Marion?" asked Miss Fielding.

"Indeed I would!" said the girl sincerely. "And all their lovely colors. Wouldn't it be great fun," she added in a sudden burst of enthusiasm, "to sketch a tiny picture of each one and then later fill it in with water colors?"

"Could you do that?" asked Miss Fielding curiously.

"I'm sure I could," said Marion positively.

The day was a revelation of life and color. Marion's eager eyes caught unsuspected mines of brilliant hues she loved. She was reluctant to turn back when at last Miss Fielding suggested it.

"Don't tire yourself," said Miss Fielding wisely, "and we'll come again to-morrow."

Thus it was that they went into the forest again and again, finding bright-winged birds and butterflies, and — something better — a fresh, new enthusiasm for Marion.

Miss Fielding found in a certain inexhaustible camp-trunk a book in which Marion jealously recorded her many bird-friends. She kept it scrupulously, coloring each bird with such delicacy and precision that Miss Fielding was astonished. Butterflies caught her interest next and the water-colored pages glowed with brilliant, soft-flecked wings. The girl was wholesomely gratifying her passionate love of color and her interest was cumulative. Moths and bees, grasses and wild-flowers, trees and ferns and mosses one by one found their way into the colorful pages of Marion's nature book and nights the girls gathered about it, carefully inspected the clever woodland sketches and the woodland lore printed in a fine, clear, girlish hand, and *cheered.*

Marion was delighted. She wrote a little diffidently to her father and mother and colored with pleasure at the instant letter of encouragement

that came back. Miss Fielding wrote of Marion's skill in drawing and her aptitude with colors. And one memorable night there was a letter from Marion's father that Miss Fielding read aloud.

"I am delighted!" ran the letter. "Marion has sent me her book of birds and grasses and butterflies with the strict proviso that I am to send it straight back, and I am astonished at the fidelity with which she has reproduced them in color. None of us ever dreamed that she possessed such a talent. To be sure, we have all frequently spoken of her love of vivid colors and we have scolded some — but Marion is a little headstrong and given to having her own way, particularly about clothes. I see much of her love of color in these woodland sketches. She has written glowingly of the patience with which you have directed her work and her interest. It pleases me that you have such faith in her ability. I am, on the strength of it, arranging an art course for her in the fall."

Marion flushed with pleasure.

Joining hands the girls cheered and cheered again for the Camp Fire work that had helped an artist find herself.

"So," wrote Miss Fielding that night, "at last we are accomplishing something worth while. May Hollins has found health here in the heart of this quiet forest. Mabel Wing has conquered many sluggish habits of sleeping and eating and is honestly developing considerable crude skill in camp-carpentry; she has made one or two excellent pieces of 'box' furniture. But I am proudest of all of Marion. For we have turned into a wholesome channel a force that, curiously enough, before this has been more harmful to her than beneficial: her passion for color."

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERY OF ELLEN

There had been a quarrel, as usual the result of Ellen's sharp tongue. Edna had retired to her tent in tears, for she had been the object of Ellen's cutting sarcasm. And Ida — shy, tender little Ida, who almost cried if she crushed a forest flower — had flashed fire and stamped her foot and told Ellen bluntly she was spiteful and unpleasant.

Ellen laughed.

"You are human, aren't you?" she queried of Ida, her eyes for the moment approving. "I always thought you were just a silly little mousie without a single spark of human fire in you anywhere. And you are, too — save when that precious 'grown up' sister of yours is at stake, and then you'll do anything."

Ida colored and began to cry.

A general constraint settled over the girls by the camp fire. The night was a little chill. The shadows lay like dark, mysterious velvet over the

hills and forest. Over by his tent at the edge of camp, Joe smoked a placid pipe.

Presently Mabel Wing rose, yawning.

"Think I'll turn in, girls," she said. "May's promised me to add another good mile to our tramp in the morning and I have to get up pretty early. Who else is going?"

Ida wiped her eyes. Then with her usual, sweet-tempered little laugh, a laugh, however, that was still a little tearful, she said she'd be up with the very first peal of Mabel's alarm. Marion Ralston spoke of a hollow that Joe had said was alive with birds in the early morning. Only Ellen said nothing. For Ellen's sharp eyes had caught a look of weariness and discouragement in Miss Fielding's eyes and the girl had grown suddenly quiet, a furtive glimmer of guilt in her face.

"You're tired, Miss Fielding," she said abruptly as the girls filed off one by one to their tents.

"A little," admitted Miss Fielding.

She glanced uncertainly at Ellen's dark, gypsy face framed softly in the glow from the fire and something in the girl's face, something softer, something a shade more approachable than she

had ever caught before, made her put out her hand impulsively.

"Oh, Ellen, Ellen," she said, "why do you say such things? You make it so very hard for me."

Ellen's face flamed.

"Hard for you?" she said. "Why?"

"Every time you make the girls quarrel or restless it makes me very unhappy."

"I — I never meant to make you unhappy," blurted Ellen. "I — I'd rather never do that. You believe me?"

"Yes. But — oh, can't you see, Ellen, I'm working so hard to teach them good will and teamwork and all the unselfish, helpful things in life that count, and when there's unrest or friction it's like a break in the pattern. I have to mend it all over again."

Ellen laughed scornfully.

"They're a selfish lot, Miss Fielding," she said, shrugging. "I know them all better than you do. They aren't worth it."

Miss Fielding glanced keenly at the girl at her side.

"Ellen," she said quietly, "why is it that you can always see the faults of people so clearly?"

"I don't know." The girl laughed recklessly. "But I can see my own, too, Miss Fielding. You can't deny that. I know I'm homely and snappy and restless and impatient. I haven't a single decent characteristic."

"You're the most ruthlessly honest girl I ever saw," said Miss Fielding warmly, "but I wish you'd try to look once in a while for the pleasanter side of people. There's always a pleasanter side, isn't there?"

"Don't I admit it when I do see it?" flashed Ellen. "Haven't I liked Mabel Wing better since she caught me that morning with the green bug and showed some decent spirit? Didn't I like Ida even better for scolding at me to-night? It's because I never see much of the better side of the girls, Miss Fielding, that I — I don't respect them more. They're clothes-crazy. When they do act like unselfish human beings, I'm glad of it, even if I don't always show it."

From Mabel's tent came suddenly the sound of her round, full soprano raised in the camp's "Boo-Ga-Man's Song" for the dark. One by one

from the tents where they were snuggled drowsily under blankets, the girls took it up and the camp rang with the musical lilt.

"When they act like that," said Ellen, "I like them all. It's — well — sort of *real*. When Edna sulks, though, I could pinch her and fairly pull her hair out by the roots."

What witch-like instincts this girl possessed! Miss Fielding glanced sharply at her.

"And yet, Ellen," she said, "that isn't at all the Camp Fire spirit. We ought to try gently enough to help Edna out of her selfish, sullen ways — not make spiteful remarks that only make her bitterly resentful and the rest of the camp uncomfortable. Haven't you ever noticed, Ellen, that every girl is gentler and sweeter somehow when she's speaking to Ida Holmes than at any other time?"

Ellen's face softened.

"Everybody loves mousie," she said. "She's a dear little thing."

"And — forgive me, Ellen, for speaking so plainly, but haven't you ever noticed that when you speak, every girl is instantly on her guard? She is expecting something aggressive — "

"Something tart and snappy," put in Ellen, shrugging.

"Exactly," said Miss Fielding. "Ida is so sweet and gentle and tender that she calls out the best side of every girl with whom she comes in contact. You are so — so aggressive — so ready to find the worst side of people that you call it forth. Isn't that true?"

"It may be," said Ellen uncertainly. "I — I never thought of it that way."

"Even to-night, sweet and forgiving and timid as Ida is, you made her temper flash. Didn't you?"

"Yes. But Ida would be a little better off, Miss Fielding," added Ellen shrewdly, "if her temper only flashed a little oftener. She's under Edna's thumb. I like to see her assert herself."

They fell silent for an interval. The camp fire died down with a drowsy crackle. The coal of Joe's pipe had vanished. From his tent came a gentle snore. The sound of Maude's pawing came clearly through the quiet.

"How peaceful it is to-night!" exclaimed Miss Fielding. "I love the embers."

"You want me with you?" demanded Ellen sharply.

"Of course," said Miss Fielding, slipping her arm about the girl's shoulders.

"I — I don't understand that," said Ellen, biting her lips queerly. "Nobody ever does."

"Want you?"

"Yes."

"Isn't it —" Katherine Fielding hesitated, uncertain just how far she might go with this strange little friend that nobody understood, "isn't it because they're a little afraid of you?"

"I don't know. Is it?"

"I think it is. You're keen and clever and very quick and they fear your tongue —"

"I'm *clever* —" Ellen caught Miss Fielding's hand. "You mean *that* — you — you really think it?"

"Mean it? Why, Ellen, you're easily the cleverest girl in camp, but you misuse your energy and you misuse your brain and you misuse your tongue. You're so busy looking for the faults of your friends that you're never quite yourself."

"Nobody," said Ellen, "ever told me I was clever."

"Nobody," hinted Miss Fielding, "would dare. If you happened to feel a little embarrassed and self-conscious when you were told, you'd flash back something sharp and sarcastic and they wouldn't understand."

"I — I guess you're right," said Ellen. There was no resentment in her face.

"Tell me," Miss Fielding's voice was very gentle, "Why did you cry that morning when I found you by Mabel's tent — that first morning you woke her with pebbles?"

"Because," said Ellen instantly, her color rising, "I'd done something mean and spiteful. You thought I'd just meant to — to surprise you and — and so few people ever give me credit for anything kind or nice. It hurt when I had to tell you different and then instead of scolding, you — you spoke nicely to me because I'd been honest and truthful at least and, oh! — Oh! Miss Fielding, I couldn't stand it."

Hot tears rained passionately down Ellen's face.

"You — you picked out the one good thing in what I did," she went on, "and spoke of that

instead of dwelling on the malice that made me wake Mabel that way. Most people would only speak of the spiteful side. Nobody ever pays me compliments."

Her small, dark eyes shining with tears met Katherine Fielding's squarely and in that instant Miss Fielding knew that by that act of the morning she had won this girl's secret devotion forever — that in her hands lay the making or the marring of that beginning she had made.

Ellen caught her hands.

"Miss Fielding," she said, "I've always wanted to be pretty like June and Edna, and it makes me unhappy because I'm not. My clothes never look right and my hair never seems to go up like other girls'. I've often wondered if it's because mother's gone — "

"It's because you're too impatient," said Miss Fielding. "I've watched you do your hair, Ellen, and if it doesn't twist or braid just right the first time, you fling it about and shrug and let it go. Don't you? "

"I suppose I do. I'm always impatient."

"And it's the same when you dress. You never

take time enough. You always omit some trifling essential to neatness and prettiness because you're so impatient. Neatness takes time."

"Like tying on a sash," nodded Ellen. "I know. Sometimes," she added, "the reason I don't do things over is because I get to thinking how much I despise the girls for thinking of nothing else. And yet I'm no better. I'd like to be pretty. I'd like to do my hair stylishly. I — I'd like to get that clever twist to a sash that Edna does."

Impatient — keen — critical — but most of all lonely! Wasn't that after all the keynote of Ellen's life? She held her real self aloof — but why?

"Impatient as you are," Miss Fielding pointed out, "you've infinite patience at times. Look at all the trouble you took merely to frighten Mabel with that green bug — "

"I've the wrong kind of patience," said Ellen bluntly. "It comes only when I can put it to some bad use."

"Wouldn't it be better to use your patience in gentler ways? Wouldn't it be better to use up just a little of it with the refractory braid — just

a little more with your gown or your sash? Why not save it for the things that need it?"

"I — I used to be different," said Ellen, flushing.

"Yes?"

"When I lived with my grandmother. My mother was sick for years. Father and she were abroad — "

"Yes?"

"My grandmother was old-fashioned. She taught me to sew and bake and sweep. I — I loved it."

It was the first glimpse of the real Ellen. Miss Fielding sat very quiet.

"And then when mother died and father brought me to town, I met Edna's crowd and when I spoke of — of the old-fashioned girl-things I liked, they laughed and made fun of me. I was lonely. I'm always lonely. And I hated them all for a while. I saw they were spiteful and that they said cattish things about each other and none of them seemed to think of anything but clothes. I grew ashamed of the things I liked to do because they were so old-fashioned. Edna called them 'common.' Now I never speak of them."

Her eyes flashed fire.

"Not one of them knows the things a girl ought to know, Miss Fielding," she exclaimed. "I despise them because I do. And I despise myself because I'm so ashamed of what I do know. I'm just snob enough for that."

She cried a little more. It was the utter honesty of the girl that touched Miss Fielding. She was bitter enough in her denunciation of the others, to be sure, but, too, she was unsparing in her criticism of herself.

"Every real Camp Fire Girl," said Miss Fielding, "be she rich or poor, is proud to know how to do the homeliest tasks. With the right sort of girl we very soon overcome her silly prejudices to dish-washing and paring potatoes. Camp Fire Girls like to use their hands. Many and many a girl has won honor beads with the things you know how to do, Ellen, and you really ought to be very proud of your training."

"I ought to be," said Ellen, "but I'm not."

They talked until the embers were nearly cold. Ellen went to bed to lie wakeful until morning. She was learning much in the forest.

Now Ellen had a wealth of dark, wavy hair and

in the morning, with the memory of Miss Fielding's sympathetic words still spurring her to an effort of patience, she combed it with unwonted neatness and felt a glow of satisfaction. Mabel Wing was the first to notice it.

"Great Scott," she exclaimed, "look at Ellen's hair. She looks like a fashion plate."

Ellen turned scarlet and walked away.

Ida slipped after her.

"It does look pretty, Ellen," she said. "Why don't you always do it that way?"

Ellen bent suddenly and kissed her.

"Why are you so nice to me?" she said. "Wasn't I horrid to your sister last night and to you?"

Ida laughed shyly.

"But that wasn't the real you, Ellen," she said with unexpected keenness. "Sometimes I don't think we ever see the real you only like now when your eyes are so sort of kind and pretty."

Ellen hurried away from her.

"I — I don't know what it is," she said vexedly, "that makes me want to cry so often."

"Every Camp Fire Girl loves beauty," said Miss Fielding, one night by the fire when Ellen

had lingered after the others, "and though we mustn't dwell upon personal adornment enough to make us vain, still every one of us ought to look just as neat and pretty as we can."

So to please Miss Fielding, Ellen tried to be neat. Not to hurt Miss Fielding again, she tried very hard to curb her tongue. And though there was many and many a flash of the old biting Ellen, there were, too, thanks to the helpful talks by the embers of the camp fire, glimpses of a gentler girl whom they all liked better. One by one the girls noticed, spoke of it in whispers and told Miss Fielding.

"It's true," insisted Marion Ralston; "her face shows it. There's something really fascinating about Ellen's face when she smiles and you know she means it and that she isn't going to make fun of you."

Ida, little dove of good tidings, whispered the remark to Ellen later in the day.

"And — and," she finished breathlessly, "Mabel Wing said the only thing that kept you from being pretty before was the sharp, bity look on your face."

So Ellen came to know that there was a beauty in expression.

And presently the camp began to help Ellen to be kind and Ellen began to look for the pleasanter side of things and miraculously found it! The girls were learning team work!

CHAPTER XV

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

B-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! went Mabel Wing's alarm clock.

Mabel sat up and blinked.

"Funny," she grumbled, "how I do hate that alarm clock in the morning. And I feel fairly friendly toward it at night."

She sat very still, arms hugging her knees; then very deliberately she began a sort of chant.

"Mabel Wing, you are to remember that you promised yourself to keep on losing weight. You are to remember that you promised to help May Hollins stay healthy and have red cheeks. You are to remember that you promised to rouse the camp at daybreak and never backslide; that you're to control the deadly hatred you have in your heart for that alarm clock, and that you're to get up your nerve by repeating aloud this courage chant Ellen wrote for you. Ready! Go!"

Mabel leaped from bed. An instant later the

girls heard her voice raised courageously in the camp's "Work Song."

"What you working on, Mabel?" sang out Ellen from her tent, for the song was a camp fire one to make a hard task easier.

"It's work to get up," called back Mabel. "My, but it is a breezy morning. Ready, girls, help me sing."

A sturdy chorus floated instantly out on the morning air.

Usually Mabel's alarm clock roused Nora. This morning somehow it was unavailing. Even after Mabel had dressed and tramped about to assure herself that the camp was really on its way to general activity, Nora had not yet put in an appearance.

"I miss the smell of coffee," said Marion Ralston, sniffing. "Nora's most always got the fire going and the coffee on by the time I'm dressed. Wonder what's the matter."

"I'll see," said Mabel, bustling off with her usual early morning air of importance. "Likely you've dressed quicker than you usually do."

An instant later she wildly screamed: "Help! Murder! Thieves!" and seizing a stick, rushed

for the gong swinging from a tree branch. Mabel had a fine sense of the dramatic. Having summoned every girl by the most expressive trio of words she could find and by a wild commotion on the gong, she burst forth:

"Girls, Nora has been kidnapped!"

"Nonsense, Mabel," exclaimed Miss Fielding, hurrying over toward Nora's tent. "Do stop making those dreadful faces and screaming. You've frightened the girls nearly to death. Nora must be around here somewhere."

"Maybe she's just out on a morning tramp," suggested May Hollins vaguely as they all trooped excitedly over to Nora's tent. "It must be that."

"Nora doesn't tramp and her clothes are gone," said Mabel with another hysterical scream. "Girls!" her voice lowered impressively and it was evident she was enjoying the sensation she had roused, "it's perfectly plain to me now that there are either pirates or bandits in that forest. First a robbery and then a grown-up person kidnapped in the night, with all her clothes. I tell you that's real mystery. I'm scared to death."

By this time they were all clustering about Nora's tent. Mabel's dramatic announcement was

true. Nora's bed was empty and her clothes were gone. The tent bore every appearance of having been permanently vacated.

"If Nora's gone," said Miss Fielding firmly, "and she certainly is, she must have gone of her own accord. The tent's in perfect order. I—I don't understand it."

"What's the trouble, Miss Katherine?" asked Joe coming up. "Is Maude out ballyhooin' in the woods again?"

"No," said Miss Fielding, "but Nora's gone, clothes and all!"

Joe whistled and scratched his chin.

"What ye going to do about breakfast?" he demanded.

There was a general hush of expectancy and the girls looked at Joe.

"Because," went on Joe with surprising alacrity, "I couldn't cook a grasshopper if he hopped in the fire and got himself all ready. I hain't got no natural bent that way."

The girls looked crestfallen. Not so Miss Fielding, for all she looked hard at Joe and made him uneasy.

"I'm quite able to prepare breakfast," she said

at length. "Joe, you go gather wood for the fire."

Ellen Birch rolled up her sleeves.

"Let me get breakfast, Miss Fielding," she pleaded impetuously. "I'd love it. Who'll help me?"

"I'll help," said Ida.

"So will I," said May.

"I'm not clever at that sort of thing," said Marion Ralston, "but anything the others do, I'll do too."

"Don't 'spose you can lose weight just helping with breakfast," commented Mabel Wing doubtfully, "but I'm no spoilsport. Tell you what: I'll gather wood for the fire. That'll reduce my arm muscles. Joe can do some other chores. Come on, May."

Giggling they set to work.

For an interval the general excitement of gathering wood and locating food and dishes overshadowed the singular mystery of Nora's disappearance. Then the girls began to wonder again.

"My theory is," said Mabel Wing, panting along under a load of wood sufficient for several fires, "that she's just walked out. I've read about that. A delegate or something from the United

States or the union likely came along in the night and beckoned at her and Nora just simply had to pack up and follow him. That happens, you know."

"Or maybe somebody did kidnap her," ventured May. "If there are pirates or bandits in the woods, they may need a good cook. So many mysterious things have happened lately and you know Ellen said Nora did act so fearfully queer about the green beads. Maybe she lost her mind suddenly. I heard her say just the other day that if she had to go chasing around much oftener after Maude, she'd go crazy."

"If I had my way," said Mabel severely, "I'd nail Maude's leg to a tree. She's the giddiest old thing for a horse that I ever saw. And she always breaks loose some funny hour."

In the camp kitchen Ellen was enveloped in an apron of Nora's. Two bright spots of scarlet had appeared on her pale, dark cheeks.

"Ida," she said, "did you happen to notice Joe when Miss Fielding told him Nora was gone? . . . Marion, find a frying pan. . . . Did you, Ida?"

"No," said Ida. "What did he do?"

"Well," said Ellen, briskly measuring out tablespoons of coffee, "I may be getting suspicious but it didn't seem to me that he was half as much surprised and horrified as he ought to have been."

"Dear me," said Ida nervously, "you don't think Joe kidnapped her, do you, Ellen? He really doesn't look at all like that kind of man. And Nora was so lumpy and heavy and Joe's sort of thin — "

"Bless your heart, no!" said Ellen. "*I* mean, Ida Holmes, that he knows where she's gone or I miss my guess. He pretended to whistle but I was watching him. I don't miss anything like that. And how quick he was to say he couldn't cook. Nobody cares whether he cooks or not."

"You're always terribly smart about seeing everything," said Ida. "And my, Ellen, how you do fly around."

Flying indeed! For Ellen, invested with energetic dignity now that she was supervising the work of others, was rushing hither and yon, beating up a business-like batter for flapjacks and making the coffee, calling terse instructions to Mabel about the disposal of the wood and the

building of the fire, all in such a glow of determination that it was positively contagious.

Only June and Edna held aloof and seemed amused.

Miss Fielding set the table. Once she appeared in the kitchen and smiled.

"Ellen," she said radiantly, "I'm positively delighted. I really didn't dream we had such a competent girl in camp."

Ellen colored with pleasure.

"Don't you remember, Miss Fielding," she blurted, "I — I told you I could do this sort of thing? My grandmother taught me."

She went on energetically with the preparation of breakfast and presently the girls sat down to an excellent camp meal of ham and eggs and rolls and coffee and oatmeal and flapjacks. Ellen herself insisted upon serving. It was queer the metamorphosis that had come over her now that she was interested and busy. Her cheeks were glowing, her eyes shone; she even laughed and hummed a little while she was making flapjacks.

The girls were all hungry and as they finished breakfast, they clustered about the kitchen and cheered the cook.

"Now," said Marion Ralston struggling into an apron, "I don't know how, but, Ellen, you're going to teach me the way to bake flapjacks and then you're going to sit down and we'll all serve you."

Which they did — all the girls, save June and Edna helping — and the breakfast became a lark. Mabel Wing threw a towel over her arm and aped the air of an experienced waitress. Marion baked flapjacks and burned a great many, though Ellen ate them without a murmur. Ida poured the coffee and May hurried briskly about with a plate of rolls.

"Well," said Mabel with a sigh when the dishes were washed and the camp in order, "I'll bet every one of us won a mile of honor beads this morning and it was *fun!* But where in the world do you suppose Nora can be?"

CHAPTER XVI

HOW PINE-TREE CAMP LEARNED A LESSON IN WORK

One — two — three days passed and still Nora did not return. Excitement was rife in Pine-Tree Camp. Miss Fielding and the girls rode down to the village and reported her singular disappearance to the town marshal. He appeared impressed but helpless. Nora had not been seen in the village. They tried next to find another cook and even inserted an advertisement in the village paper. Quite in vain. There was evidently no woman to be had.

Mabel laboriously printed a handbill to the effect that five dollars reward would be paid to the person or persons bringing Nora back alive or dead. Nora was not returned in either state.

Ellen went on cooking for the camp with feverish energy and as usual her energy infected them all. She was not without helpers.

"What in the world shall we do?" said Miss Fielding one night. "There isn't a desirable woman in the village and I wouldn't have believed

Joe could be so stupid. You can't even teach him to make coffee.

"It's my opinion," said Ellen, "that Joe doesn't want to learn. Joe's changed. He used to be so willing and energetic and now he couldn't be lazier or stupider. Ever since Nora went he's been worse. I think he's acting very strange."

Miss Fielding hurriedly changed the subject.

"I haven't ever thought so much of Joe," said Mabel Wing, "since he bought me that stringy ham. Why couldn't we telegraph to the city for a cook?"

Ellen seemed about to speak and changed her mind. After an interval of constraint, however, she colored and looked at Miss Fielding.

"Miss Fielding," she said, "why can't we do our own work? I think it would be loads of fun."

"Work!" echoed Mabel Wing indignantly. "Ellen Birch, you've certainly lost your mind."

"No," said Ellen defiantly, "I haven't. I've never had such a good time before in my life as I've had since Nora disappeared. I — I love to fuss and plan and we can make a regular lark of it. Besides, every Camp Fire Girl ought to know how to cook and keep house — Miss Fielding said

so — and we can win honor beads at the same time. What do you say, girls? ''

'' I think it's positively absurd,'' flashed June Tuttle.

'' I shan't help,'' said Edna proudly. '' And I won't even try to. If you take up any such wild scheme you'll have to do without me.''

'' We don't need you,'' snapped Ellen. '' We need willing brains and hands and you've neither.'' Then catching Miss Fielding's glance, she colored and bit her lip.

'' I'll help,'' said Ida, interposing her inevitable wedge of peace-making.

'' And so'll I,'' said May Hollins sturdily. '' We're in a hole and I don't see what else we can do, do you, Marion? ''

'' No,'' said Marion. '' I haven't minded helping a bit and I can do it again.''

Mabel groaned.

'' Well,'' she said, '' if you're all going to help, I'll have to help too — but how I dread it.''

So, spurred on by Ellen Birch's energetic enjoyment of the one thing she knew and knew well, the camp was reorganized.

And then such housekeeping and marketing —

such endless discussions of fires and foods — such tired and busy girls! Ellen was tireless in her instruction of the others. Miss Fielding was amazed at the hoard of domestic lore the girl had hidden away in her heart, fearful of ridicule.

"And, Miss Fielding," exclaimed Ellen one night, "the girls don't laugh any more — they seem to have so much respect for anything I say."

"It's respect for work well done," nodded Miss Fielding.

"And they're all so helpful — all but June and Edna. It's real fun."

"It is indeed!" exclaimed Miss Fielding. "I'm simply delighted with all of you."

Little by little system evolved from chaos. The girls took turns as camp cook, housekeeper, fireman and marketer. They kept laborious records of expenses. Slowly but surely, though no one save Miss Fielding realized it, these girls were learning as they had never known before in their lives, the value of a dollar. When it came Mabel's day to market there was a panic in camp. Miss Fielding had allotted a certain amount per day for table expenses. Mabel's bill was three times what it should have been.

"I don't see how it happened, Miss Fielding," she grumbled, aghast. "I truly don't. I'm simply flabbergasted at the way things cost. It's criminal. Why don't they put a law in Congress to make butchers and grocers charge less. They're robbers."

"But look at the kind of things you bought," demurred May. "You were fearfully extravagant."

"Give me another chance," said Mabel grimly, "and I'll put you all in the shade."

So Mabel was given another opportunity to descend into the village with a market basket and by dint of much thought she broke the camp's record for economy by twenty-one cents. Only May knew that she had haggled fiercely with the grocer for an hour and forced him to reduce his price one cent on every purchase she made.

It came to be a matter of great rivalry — who could market for the camp with most economy.

There came a morning when June Tuttle, glancing toward the lake, caught a glimpse of Miss Fielding, busily bending over a galvanized tub.

"What's she doing?" she exclaimed to Edna.

Edna's nose curled.

"Washing her own clothes!" she said.

"That's the most common thing she's done yet," commented June. "Isn't it dreadful, Edna? I told you she was that sort of person — "

But the other girls collected around the tub on the shore and cheered!

It was another case of Tom Sawyer's fence. Miss Fielding did not so much as hint that each girl would have to do her own laundering. She merely went on working and humming, and spurred on by the energetic example before her eyes, Mabel appeared after a while with an armful of clothing and another tub and went to work until her face was red and shining.

"Don't watch me," she warned the others. "If I get to laughing I'll never stop. There's a stack of these little tubs up there. Wonder why Nora had so many? "

Miss Fielding pretended not to hear.

"My! My!" puffed Mabel after a desperate interval of work, "this certainly ought to do my back muscles a lot of good." At which there was a general outburst of laughter, for Mabel's remark proved why she had been the first to try.

Ellen Birch was next. One by one the girls

appeared with tubs and soap. When it came time for the camp tablecloths and napkins, they all took turns. There was much humorous complaint and a great deal of groaning, but again somehow the girls contrived to make a lark of it. The Camp Fire spirit was doing its work. And presently came the vigorous rhythm of the " Work Song " from the girls along the shore.

Ida, who had been marketing with Joe, stopped only long enough to learn the cause of all the fun and laughter; then she came running up to her tent.

" What are you going to do? " demanded Edna.

" Wash out my things," said Ida breathlessly. " Oh, Edna, the girls are having a perfectly splendid time. Mabel's too funny for anything. She says she's worked off two inches of fat from every muscle in her back and Miss Fielding won't let her work any more for fear she'll hurt herself. And she is terribly red and mussed up. Isn't it perfectly killing! "

Edna stamped her foot.

" It's common," she flashed. " Don't dare let me see you down there washing clothes. It's disgusting, Ida, absolutely disgusting."

"But, Edna," said Ida wide-eyed, "Miss Fielding even did her things and if she could — why — I — I don't see why I can't. And we can all win honor beads. Besides, they're all having such a good time. Ellen's telling them all how much bluing to use, and starch and things, and so's Miss Fielding. They both know just how — "

"Miss Fielding," said June insolently, "is a common person. Naturally she'd know all about common work. The girls are making perfect fools of themselves."

Ida went on gathering up her things.

Edna stamped her foot.

"Ida," she said, "I will not have my sister doing such horridly common things!" She wheeled at a sound behind her. Miss Fielding had halted scarcely a foot away.

All the pent-up resentment of the summer flamed in Edna's face.

"Oh," she cried, "how dare you tell my sister to do such vulgar things!"

It was time at last to take a forceful stand. With a sigh Katherine Fielding took it.

"Take your things on down to the water, Ida," she said gently. "I'll talk to your sister."

Ida started blithely away. The fun and laughter on the lake shore was too strong a temptation for her.

"Ida," commanded Edna imperiously, "don't you dare go down there."

Ida flushed, glanced once at Edna's indignant face and then at the lake shore where Mabel was brandishing a bar of soap and the girls were screaming with laughter. Then she glanced wistfully at Miss Fielding and seemed about to cry.

"Ida," said Miss Fielding, "I want you to do just what you think is right. You ought to decide for yourself, and not think of either Edna or me."

"I'll go, Miss Fielding," she said and ran to join the others. It was the first time Miss Fielding had seen her do anything in direct opposition to Edna's wishes.

Edna colored furiously. Her vanity was hurt.

"How dare you turn my sister against me," she sobbed. "I hate you. You've spoiled Ida and everybody else and you're making the girls all horridly common and — and — "

"Edna," said Miss Fielding quietly, "you might just as well hear a few facts now. You've tried very hard to spoil the summer for me and

if it's any consolation at all to you to hear it, you have succeeded in making things very hard indeed. You've held the other girls back. You've been sullen and haughty and unwilling to help in any way and you've been a great drawback to Ida. You've kept her struggling constantly between a sense of loyalty to you and her own inclinations. All your life you've dominated her so that she has scarcely any individuality of her own. That's why she cries and blushes so easily. She looks to you for everything. You've been domineering and selfish and arrogant and I'm very sorry for it. Whenever Ida wants to be just a sweet, wholesome, happy-hearted little girl, you won't let her. Lots of things this summer she's done most reluctantly simply because you held yourself aloof and wouldn't join us when I wanted you along with all the others girls to learn team work and good-fellowship and the spirit of unselfish comradeship in general. I haven't turned Ida against you. She loves you now a great deal better than you love her. She isn't so selfish. If I've helped her assert herself a little, I'm very glad. There's the making of a wonderful little woman in Ida, but it's buried under that shy lack of assurance that you've

helped foster. I hope she'll find herself and I hope the Camp Fire work will help her." Miss Fielding suddenly held out her hand. "Oh, Edna, Edna," she exclaimed impulsively, "why not help me a little? Can't we at least be friends?"

"No!" said Edna and ran wildly away to her tent. Miss Fielding heard the sound of her angry sobbing and June's voice soothing her; then she went back to the girls on the shore.

There came a fresh wind and the camp flapped with many wash-lines. Miss Fielding wisely ignored the fact that many a handkerchief on the line was streaked and mottled.

Not so Mabel Wing. Her comment was characteristic.

"I've striped handkerchiefs and leopard-spotted ones and some nearly clean," she snickered, "but I'll do better next time."

That Mabel was willing there should be a "next time," reflected Miss Fielding, was a source of considerable satisfaction.

To the "Work Song," many young arms ironed pillow cases and napkins and tablecloths, Mabel talking volubly as usual of the muscles in her arm.

But Ellen was quieter. Her keen brain was busy with another mystery.

Why, since Nora had plainly been expected to do the camp washing, was there a washtub apiece in camp for the girls? Why were there so many ironing boards and irons?

But this mystery — like the mystery of the robbery and Nora's disappearance — found no immediate solution.

There came a council fire and a crowd of delighted Camp Fire Girls in ceremonial robes strung honor beads on thongs of leather. Only June and Edna had nothing meritorious to report.

So the busy camp went singing, laughing, working its way through happy summer days, its activity a tribute to Miss Fielding's personality and her hold upon the girls. None of them realized what a startling wealth of knowledge they were steadily accumulating in the guise of larks. No one realized how Miss Fielding had wisely watched for the better side of every girl and helped it grow. Ellen's energy, Mabel's good-humor and Ida's shy sweetness had helped her weld the girls together. Ellen, head housekeeper of an active camp, was far too busy to indulge in

malicious pranks or sharp remarks. Ida, busy, was less self-conscious, less prone to cry and blush, although at times she was wildly unhappy at Edna's proud aloofness and cried herself to sleep one night on Miss Fielding's shoulder. And May's cheeks grew rosier and Mabel Wing grew thinner. The camp was teeming with life and energy. But it was no longer a camp of fashionable young ladies. It was a camp of rollicking, fun-loving girls.

CHAPTER XVII

JUNE TUTTLE

So matters stood when the letter came that brought June Tuttle to her senses.

The afternoon was very warm. Down by the water's edge the girls in bathing suits were splashing about and laughing at Mabel's antics. Edna and June were as usual off by themselves.

June laid aside a letter from her sister, drew her breath sharply and colored.

"I — I simply can't believe it!" she said.

"What?" inquired Edna carelessly, her glance wandering to Ellen Birch, who was swimming with the agility of a fish.

"My sister," said June, looking very guilty and uncomfortable. "She writes something about Miss Fielding — Oh, Edna! isn't it dreadful! She's wealthy and — and she does all this just for the love of it and because she thinks everyone should be of service to others and that girls are brought up wrong anyway — 'specially wealthy

ones. And — and I've treated her like a servant — "

"Who in the world are you talking about?" demanded Edna, wide-eyed. "Your sister?"

"No," said June, flushing, "Miss Fielding. She's Katherine Grenfell-Fielding. If I'd only known she was a Grenfell-Fielding I'd have understood. You've heard of them, haven't you? I don't know what in the world to do."

June looked ready to cry.

"The Grenfell-Fieldings are sinfully rich," she said. "And Miss Fielding's an heiress to all sorts of things. My sister went to school in Dresden with Kate Fielding. I — I remember now. I never dreamed before of connecting the two."

"Kate Fielding!" exclaimed Edna. "Why, I've heard of her too. Grandfather met her on the steamer when he was coming home and he simply raved about her. Said she knew everything a girl ought to know and more. I'd forgotten her name until you spoke."

"My sister is just home from abroad," said June, "and just as soon as she heard that I was here and Miss Fielding was our guardian she wrote me to be sure and bring her home with me

— and she's written a whole letter about it. I'm so upset I could cry."

"What will you do?" asked Edna, aghast.

"I — I don't know," said June. "I honestly don't. It's the worst fix I was ever in. Father would scold horribly — I know he would. He has such democratic ideas and he's always scolding mother because she's so — well — different. I've treated Miss Fielding shamefully. I thought she was just a common sort of person hired for this and, oh, Edna! how was I to know that she was wealthy and had queer ideas about social service and hated frivolous society like sister writes?"

"You couldn't, of course," agreed Edna. It seemed to occur to neither that June's rudeness was inexcusable no matter what the circumstances.

"And sister says she managed a camp in the Adirondacks last summer — Miss Fielding, I mean — and everybody's simply crazy about her. Money hasn't spoiled her at all. You'd never know she has any. She's charming and sensible and clever, sister says — but — but she did wash her own clothes, didn't she, Edna?"

"Yes," said Edna.

June sat very quiet, staring at the shore where

Miss Fielding, her hair bright with sunlight, was laughing and chatting with the girls. What a favorite she was among them! The slender grace and poise of her body, her bright, wind-tanned skin and merry eyes made her a charming picture. How sweet and unspoiled and gracious she was! No wonder the girls loved her. . . . And then, reflecting that she had been blind to all this when she fancied Katherine Fielding but a higher servant of the camp, June had the grace to blush. Somehow her silly castles of caste were crumbling into dust. The spoiled snobbishness of the girl had at last had a genuine jolt. Here was a girl of older family than the Tuttles — with more money than any girl in camp — and she had washed and ironed and scrubbed and baked like any servant. She had taught the girls to work and had labored with them. Was there after all a real dignity of labor?

June's face grew hotter. How could she ask Miss Fielding to go home with her? How could she tell her sister she had been snobbishly rude to such a girl as Kate Fielding? How explain to her father whose patience waned alarmingly when snobbishness was in the wind?

"Miss Fielding's never so much as mentioned money," Edna was saying, "and look how economically she makes the girls manage. It's queer."

"I — I think I like her all the better for that," said June, "though, oh, dear! I wish I had known."

Edna shrugged. There were many things she could not forgive Miss Fielding.

"I think she's terribly eccentric," she said, "to work so with Camp Fire Girls when she has everything she wants — don't you?"

"I — I don't know," said June. "I'm too shocked to know what I think. I — I hate myself. Lynn will never forgive me. She used to write whole pages when she was at school about Kate Fielding and how clever and practical she was. I'm almost sick about it."

A depressed silence fell over the pair.

Now, deep down in her foolish heart June Tuttle had the germ of better things, for all they lay buried beneath a superficial shell of snobbishness. Katherine Fielding had somehow made a great gap in that shell to-day merely by the force of a wholesome personality.

"The only thing I can do," blurted June after a while, biting her lips, "is to be square and honest and decent about it and apologize. I've simply got to do it. It — it's going to be very hard and it makes me seem terribly small and mean, but I know that's what Dad would have me do, and after all he's usually right." But June was quiet and thoughtful for the rest of the day. It was a little hard to humble her pride to the dust, as she knew, in the end, she must.

At dusk, however, the battle was at an end and the finer side of June had won. Wherefore the girl halted uncertainly outside Miss Fielding's tent. There was a rude table inside, on the table a lantern, and Miss Fielding was busily writing.

"Come in," she called cheerfully. "Oh, it's you, Miss Tuttle? Do come in."

"I — I'd rather you called me June," said the girl, coloring. And then as Miss Fielding looked a little surprised, "Yes, I — I know I was horrid and told you not to call me June once before — but I'm sorry." She swallowed bravely and took the bull by the horns. "Miss Fielding," she blurted, her face crimson, "I want to apologize. I've been horrid and my sister has written — "

And suddenly June's courage deserted her and dropping into a chair by the table, she buried her face in her hands and began to cry.

Instantly Miss Fielding was on her feet.

"Don't cry, June," she said gently. "Tell me. What is it all about?"

"I thought you were just a common sort of person," sobbed June, "and my sister writes how much she thinks of you and — and that — "

June was about to say, "and that you're rich," but the words sounded so sordid that the girl in a sudden illuminating spasm of self-contempt checked them.

There was an interval of silence.

Miss Fielding smoothed back the girl's bright, beautiful hair.

"June," she said gently, "I'm sorry that anything made any difference but just myself. I would so much rather have won your friendship and respect as plain Katherine Fielding, no matter who or what she was, than as your sister's friend or because I've a penny or so more than you thought."

June clung passionately to her hand and cried some more.

"I know," she said a little wildly, "I've been perfectly horrid."

"Yes," said Katherine Fielding frankly, "you have been horrid, June, and so has Edna — but why not begin all over again and not be quite so horrid? You can help me a lot if you'll only do that. Listen, dear," she held the girl's soft, white hands very tight and glanced into her pretty, tear-stained face. "Money doesn't make any difference. You ought never to think of it in your choice of a friend. You'll forgive me, I'm sure, June, but you're always haughty and insolent to people not quite so fortunate as you are yourself. You were never nice to Nora or Joe or to me. A true Camp Fire Girl is sweet and gracious to everyone and if she meets someone who is perhaps not quite so fortunate, she's just a little sweeter — just a little more gracious, if anything, to make up for what the other girl has missed."

"I — I never supposed a girl like you would wash clothes or bake or scrub," said June, her satin-like skin flame-red of cheek. "I — wouldn't have believed it, Miss Fielding."

Miss Fielding laughed softly.

"June, dear," she said, "I'd do anything —

even dig a trench or hammer shingles on a roof — if I had to. That's why I love the Camp Fire spirit — it gives a girl such sane, wholesome ideas. If I can teach a few foolish, spoiled little girls that there isn't any disgrace in any sort of labor well done, why I'll feel that I've really accomplished something worth while." She paused. "The only sort of girl," she added deliberately, "that I don't like very much is the girl, June, that looks ahead to a life of selfish ease and — clothes. I feel very sorry for her, but I don't feel that she's either desirable or useful. Isn't that true?"

"It — it's the sort of girl I was going to be," said June. "Maybe — maybe I won't now. I wonder," she added wistfully after a while, "if you will go home with me. Lynn wants you so and so do I."

"Suppose we say," said Katherine Fielding adroitly, "that I'll go home with you if you'll put your shoulder to the wheel and help me; if you'll join in with the girls and not hold aloof, so that we can make our Camp Fire machine of good-fellowship fairly hum with achievement without a single discordant note in its music."

June's face lengthened.

"There isn't a thing I can do," she said, "save dance."

"You can learn," said Miss Fielding, "if you have the will. Anyone can."

June glanced at her beautiful soft hands and sighed. Then she thought of her inexcusable rudeness to Miss Fielding and of her sister's letter, and colored furiously.

"I'll do anything," she said impetuously, "even scrub, to make up for the way I've acted."

Miss Fielding bent and kissed her.

"You know, June," she said, "that if you banish that silly snobbery from your heart once for all and make up your mind that we're all real people with a real aim in life — you'll never make mistakes of that sort again. Isn't it true?"

"Yes," said June very humbly.

And so the Camp Fire work won another active worker. For June was untiring. Swept on by a passionate desire to atone to her sister's friend, she awkwardly lent her hands to homely tasks and learned them well.

"It isn't half so bad as I thought, Miss Fielding," she confessed. "I don't seem to mind a bit. And it's ever so much better than moping

around with Edna." At which Miss Fielding sighed — for Edna was the single flaw in the perfect harmony of Pine-Tree Camp.

"So many girls," said Miss Fielding, "won't even try. That's why lots of things are left undone and despised. They don't and won't realize that the homely tasks are not half so hard as they seem and that they soon become a real pleasure."

Nights by the fire Miss Fielding sought tactfully to correct June's sense of values.

"I've been selfish always," said June suddenly one night.

"Why?" said Miss Fielding.

"I was thinking about my guitar," said June. "Lots of times the girls ask me to play and if I don't just happen to feel in the mood or if I'm a little bit lazy, I don't do it. That isn't real Camp Fire spirit, is it?"

"Why?" asked Miss Fielding, eager to find how much her pupil had learned.

"I — I ought to play to give others pleasure, oughtn't I? — not just for myself?"

Katherine bent and kissed her.

"You're learning fast, dear!" she exclaimed radiantly. "That's the Camp Fire spirit in a nutshell."

June went to bed in a glow of delight.

Thereafter nights by the camp fire the guitar rang softly through the trees. The girls sang Camp Fire melodies to its strumming accompaniment and there was still another link in the chain of good-fellowship. And presently Miss Fielding found a way to use June's marvelous sense of rhythm and her love of dancing. She taught her many beautiful folk dances and the traditions that cling about them.

There came a day when Miss Fielding, glancing out under the trees to the east, caught a glimpse of Mabel Wing gyrating slowly in a series of elephantine movements in which she seemed to take the greatest delight. June stood near by giving directions. May Hollins joined them a minute later and then one by one the girls clustered about June and began to chatter in some excitement.

It was presently explained. June ran breathlessly to Miss Fielding's tent.

"The girls are simply wild to learn folk danc-

ing," she said. "And I've organized a class to teach them all you've taught me. That can be my special work, can't it?"

"Bless your heart," exclaimed Miss Fielding in delight, "of course it can."

"And I can win honor beads that way?"

"Just as surely as you won them cooking breakfast yesterday," agreed Miss Fielding.

So the camp-class in folk dancing went into active practice to the tinkle of June's guitar, and May Hollins' body began to acquire a marvelous suppleness and poise.

"I'm getting healthier and healthier," she sang jubilantly one morning.

June looked very proud.

"And I'm helping her, too, now, don't you think so, Miss Fielding?" she called.

Miss Fielding nodded warmly.

Edna, sitting glumly by her tent reading a book, looked up and wondered why everybody looked so radiant and why they cheered.

"June's gone and made a fool of herself too," she reflected bitterly. "I'm the only one in camp who's managed to retain any dignity at all."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HAUNTED HUT

But Edna was lonely now. With June won over to the other side, she was often alone and her pretty face grew more and more discontented. Her insolent pride made her chill and distant to Miss Fielding and since that memorable day of rebellion when Ida, in defiance to her wishes, had washed not only her own clothes but Edna's as well, she rarely spoke to her sister. For Ida was different too — a shy, furtive independence crept now and then into her manner and Edna bitterly resented it. She missed Ida's utter dependence on her own mood and will.

So Edna brooded morosely over many things: over the train of circumstances that had brought her to this camp in the hills, over her grandfather's interference and his old-fashioned ideas, over the loss of her pretty clothes and Ida's growing independence. As the merry days filed by she was very unhappy.

The laughter, the music, the work and energy

in camp, the loyal good-fellowship growing with the days, made her lonelier. Still she was far too proud to join the girls now for all she often gazed with furtive wistfulness at their fun. A real "grown up" of course couldn't afford to make concessions to a band of "little girls," and Edna was by two months the senior of the camp.

"I wish we'd have another lark like the ghost dance," she thought. "I could go on that."

The girls had a "bacon bat" on the lake shore, and though Edna was with them, her presence seemed to cast a damper over the others and she was bitterly conscious of it.

Some faint sense of guilt stirred in her heart. The rest were all so happy, but she — Edna resolutely smothered the thought before it should menace her cherished dignity.

"I think she's getting tired of being a 'grown up'" reflected Miss Fielding, "and wants to be a little girl, but she's too proud to admit it."

"Edna," whispered Ida wistfully, "I do wish you'd apologize for — for speaking so rudely to Miss Fielding that day. Then we can begin all over again."

Edna bristled.

"You're a silly child," she said with dignity, "and I shan't apologize to Miss Fielding. After deliberately making trouble between you and me and saying all those terrible things to me, I think *she* ought to apologize."

So the camp's fun went merrily on without Edna, though one by one the girls in a spirit of kindness tried very hard to include her. Edna foolishly steeled her heart against their overtures and brooded by herself.

There came a memorable morning when Mabel, rising and repeating her "Courage Chant" with the first peal of the alarm, happened to glance from her tent — and saw Maude's tail vanishing among the trees. She promptly screamed and began to dress with furious rapidity.

"Girls," she called excitedly, "Maude's loose again. Get your clothes on in a jiffy. We've got to get her. Ellen, you better take a rope with you this time. I'm going to take a club. She's got to remember that she can't go off skylarking like this just at breakfast time."

There was a general flurry of excitement.

Maude had broken parole and vanished in the forest three times within a week. Chasing Maude, indeed, was a recognized camp lark.

Miss Fielding emerged from her tent.

"Go ahead, girls," she encouraged, "and while you're getting Maude, I'll get breakfast."

Mabel buttoned her blouse as she ran.

Now Maude, it developed, was in an exceedingly skittish mood. She'd stroll tantalizingly along, appearing to drowse, until Mabel, in a burst of indignant enthusiasm, would snatch at her tail. Then with an airy snort and a flourish of heels Maude would be off again.

"Maude can't be in her right senses," burst forth Mabel indignantly after a while. "She's sillier than I ever saw her. And either her teeth are all made in sharp notches or they're made of flint. She can bite through anything."

"'Tisn't that," said May. "She seems to know just how to undo any sort of a knot at all. Joe says she even took her blanket off the other night and it was all wound round her feet in the morning."

"She'd better join a circus," said Mabel. "Look at her now! Isn't that aggravating?"

For Maude, having apparently waited with mild politeness for the girls to come up, was off again at an easy canter.

The girls chased breathlessly after her. So eager were they all in pursuit that no one noticed the direction in which Maude was bearing until they suddenly saw straight before them — the haunted hut!

There was a general gasp of dismay.

"We promised Miss Fielding we wouldn't go near it," reminded Ellen Birch. "Didn't we, girls?"

"I didn't," said Edna with a defiant toss of her head.

The girls stared blankly at each other.

"I didn't realize we'd gone so far or that we were coming this way at all," said June. "Did you, Ida?"

"No," said Ida, shivering. "And I'm a little scary."

"There isn't any such thing as a ghost," said Edna Holmes. "Anyway, would a ghost have curtains? Don't be silly, Ida. Look! The door's open."

A little furtively, they glanced. Sure enough, the door of the haunted hut stood open.

Edna glanced with contempt at the reluctant group of girls.

"I'm going to look inside," she said, more to command their respect for her courage and to show her contempt for Miss Fielding's orders than for any other reason.

"Oh, Edna, no, no; please don't!" wailed Ida.

"Better not, Edna," advised Mabel Wing. "I don't know whether I'm afraid of a ghost or not, but I think likely I am and we did promise Miss Fielding on our word of honor that we'd keep away from this spot. Of course we've hit it by accident and it's Maude's fault — nobody else's — but if we go any further we do it deliberately and we can't blame Maude. I say — let's go on."

"You're all under Miss Fielding's thumb," cried Edna, her eyes flashing. "I'm ashamed of every one of you."

She walked insolently up to the door of the hut and pushed it wide open. Then she gave one look inside and screamed.

"W-w-w-what is it?" demanded Mabel Wing. "Is the ghost eating his breakfast?"

"Clothes!" cried Edna hoarsely.

In great excitement they clustered about her and looked in. There was a general outburst of hysterical excitement. Ranged around the walls upon hooks were the stolen dresses, and Nora's hat hung upon a hook in the corner. The hut was clean and neat. There was a rude table, a stove, a couple of chairs and a cot. A ladder led to a loft above.

"The robber lives here," whispered Mabel Wing, aghast. "That must be it. I'm simply scared to death. Or else Nora's turned robber and lives here, though I'd hate to think of Nora's turning highwayman after all those good flapjacks she made for us."

"No," said May, "I think the robber stole our clothes and then he took a notion to Nora and kidnapped her. I'm sure of it."

"Girls," said Mabel hoarsely, her sense of the dramatic spurring her to the rescue, "it's our duty as citizens of the United States, or whatever we are, to go straight down to the village and tell that marshal with the funny whiskers. I hate his whiskers, but we've got to do it. Then we'll come straight back and surround the hut. I've got a

club and you can all find sticks in the woods."

"If the robber lives here," said Edna, with curling lip, "Miss Fielding knows it. Why has she made you promise to keep away? Because she was afraid you'd look in and find your clothes. She must be in league with him — "

"No — no," came the general outraged chorus.

Edna shrugged.

Ellen spoke in a low voice of Nora and the green beads.

"Remember," she said, "we found them near the haunted hut. There's a great deal of mystery here," she added, "that I don't understand, but I have absolute faith in Miss Fielding."

"So've I," came a general chorus.

"Certainly," went on Ellen, "certainly someone lives in that hut and certainly there are our clothes and that's Nora's hat and — and look! Joe's been here too. There's the stick he cut the other day with his initials on — I remember it because it was such a queer shape and he wondered where he'd lost it."

June Tuttle suddenly made a wild leap to the side. The girls screamed apprehensively. Maude

had come back leisurely in the excitement and was browsing near by.

"June Tuttle," said Mabel indignantly, "you haven't any right to leap into the air all of a sudden that way. My heart skipped four beats."

"I've got her by one ear," gasped June. "I had to jump quick so she wouldn't guess I saw her. Somebody throw that rope around her neck. If I could only ride down to the village bareback, I'd get the marshal."

"I'll get him," said Ellen, "I've ridden bareback before. Likely I'll slide off a couple of times on the way, but I'll go. You girls walk on to the foot of the hill beyond the lake and wait until I come back. It isn't safe here." Ellen leaped excitedly on Maude's back and went thundering off through the woods, followed by admiring glances. The girls themselves hurried through the woods and down the hill to the spot where Ellen had bade them wait.

"I — I wonder if we ought to go back and tell Miss Fielding," said Ida. "She'll have breakfast all ready and she'll wonder where in the world we are."

"Certainly not," said Edna. And she added darkly, "You'll find out that your precious Miss Fielding knows a great deal more about this than you dream."

It seemed an interminable interval before far down the road appeared a cloud of dust from which Ellen presently emerged riding furiously. Maude was snorting and disgruntled, if one might judge by the angle of her ears.

"Maude's a gentle soul," said Mabel in disgust. "She hates to run unless she's playing hookey."

Following Ellen was a nondescript band of excited villagers, some riding horses, some driving wagons. A hay-wagon full of boys brought up the rear. On they came at a wild gallop, clattering, whooping and yelling.

"That's no way to get a robber," said Mabel Wing in disgust. "They'll scare him away."

At the edge of the forest the marshal swung off his horse. He was a big, raw-boned countryman, plainly alive to the importance of the occasion and himself. He wore an ancient pistol at his belt, upon which Mabel kept her eyes in fas-

cinated horror. The villagers and boys piled forth from wagons and in great excitement the band made off through the forest, Ellen leading, her eyes like coals of fire.

As they came within sight of the haunted hut, a quiet settled over the village posse. The robber's door was closed now. A faint curl of smoke floated forth from the rude chimney of his shack.

"He's in there with the door closed," whispered Mabel Wing, her eyes nearly bulging from her cheeks. "Oh, girls, isn't this just about the most thrilling experience ever? Could the robber do some great deed of arms and lay about him right and left, as they say in books, and maybe overpower this crowd? Honestly, do you think he could?"

"No-o-o-o," said Ida, her teeth chattering, "I hardly think so. Let's stay pretty much toward the back, though, and then if he does lay about him right and left, as you call it, his arm may be getting pretty tired by the time he reaches us."

"That's a pretty good notion," said Mabel. "I'd hate to have him take a hack at me with his sword or whatever he'll have."

The marshal tugged at his whiskers, seized his ancient gun and thundered impressively on the door with the butt.

"Open," he cried. "Open, by Cracky, in the name of the law!"

The door swung back instantly. An astonished old gentleman appeared upon the threshold, a handsome old man with a ruddy face and whiskers, who stared over his spectacles at the crowd and said, "Bless my soul, what's all this?"

"Grandfather!" shrieked Ida Holmes, and fainted.

CHAPTER XIX

THE RESCUE

And then so many things happened all at once that no one of the girls was ever able to give a really coherent account afterward. For while Ellen and May were applying "first aid" assistance to Ida, in accordance with Miss Fielding's daily class of instruction, Nora had appeared in the hut doorway and petrified the girls into frozen statues of astonishment and dismay by threatening the marshal with a broom.

"Go on," said she indignantly, "he's a rich old man who can buy and sell every wan of yez. He's no robber at all, at all. He's got a written permit from the young ladies' fathers to stale every blissid thing in there."

"A written permit to steal! What in the world was Nora talking about? What was she doing in the haunted hut, anyway? What — " but before another question could present itself, the crowd had closed in and amidst much protesting, Grandfather Holmes and Nora were borne off through

the woods, leaving a helpless knot of girls clustering about Ida.

Edna stared after them in horror. What could it mean — what could it mean? And why did Grandfather Holmes seem to have such utter self-possession? Why didn't he seem at all guilty and scared?

For an interval the girls lingered in a petrified group, staring after the village posse as it bore its prisoners off to the village jail. Then Mabel nudged Edna.

"You're sure it's your grandfather, aren't you, Edna?" she demanded hoarsely. "It isn't some double — or duplicate of him. I've read things like that."

"No —" said Edna, "it's grandfather, all right. Oh, Mabel, what can it mean?"

"If it is your grandfather," said Mabel, "he simply can't be a robber. And certainly he didn't kidnap Nora. There's a terrible, terrible mystery here, Edna Holmes. I don't understand it."

May Hollins, who had been bending anxiously over Ida, suddenly gave a great sigh of relief.

"There," she said, "she's coming around. Move over a little, Ellen, and give her more air."

Ida sat up, glanced in a panic at the haunted hut and began to cry.

"Oh, Edna," she wailed, "what is it all about? Why was grandfather in the hut with all the clothes? Where — where is he now?"

Mabel jabbed Edna in the ribs with a threatening finger.

"Don't dare tell her he's in jail or on the way," she hissed, "or likely she'll faint again. Girls, we're in some terrible intrigue. Let's get Ida straightened out and back to camp. I'm all at sea. My eyeballs burn from staring so and there's something or other queer about my backbone. Seems to me June ran into me once when we were chasing Maude, but I don't remember. What with Grandfather Holmes and Nora on the way to jail and the dresses in there and Joe's stick, and Ida melting out of sight in a faint, I'm all trembly." She turned gently to Ida. "Ida," she said, "there's some great mystery here and we know very well that your grandfather isn't a robber or a pirate and that he didn't kidnap Nora. We don't exactly understand why he's been living in the haunted hut, of course, or anything about

it, but just now we'd better make tracks for camp or Miss Fielding will be out looking for us."

"But — where is he now?" demanded Ida weakly.

Mabel scratched her head, seeking desperately for a plausible explanation. In the end she gave the first one that came into her head.

"He's gone down to the village with the marshal with the whiskers," she burst forth, "to get an ice cream soda." And then Mabel fell to bustling energetically about and creating a great furore of excitement to check Ida's questions, while a somewhat subdued procession filed off through the woods. Maude had disappeared again in the excitement. Nobody seemed to know when or where she had gone; and nobody seemed greatly to care.

Thus they came at last into camp to find Miss Fielding greatly disturbed and Joe off in the woods yodeling.

Miss Fielding glanced with alarm at Ida, caught Mabel's warning glance and refrained from questioning.

"What has happened, Mabel?" she demanded, as the girls bore Ida off to her tent.

"Miss Fielding," explained Mabel, her eyes fairly bulging from their sockets, "we've had a perfectly terrible time, just as exciting as Bluebeard or anything like that. Maude was giddy and silly and jigged about a lot and she led us straight to the haunted hut — honestly we were there before we realized it — and the door was open and we peeked in — and found our dresses all hung up on the walls on hooks — "

"Impossible!" exclaimed Miss Fielding, aghast, but she changed color. "You're quite sure, Mabel?"

"Positive," nodded Mabel. "And we went off and got the marshal — Ellen rode to the village bareback and my! how she did ride — like a Roman charioteer — and the marshal brought a great lot of noisy people with him to arrest the robber and when the door was opened, it was Edna's grandfather, and Ida fainted — "

"Oh, Mabel, Mabel," cried Katherine Fielding, "what have you done?"

"And the marshal's taken Grandfather Holmes off to jail, and Nora too, and we don't dare tell Ida in the state she's in now for fear the disgrace will kill her — "

"Take a breath, Mabel," advised Miss Fielding. "Your face is getting purple. Now listen carefully. You'll have to serve breakfast for me. I've simply got to go down to the village at once. I mustn't delay a minute. Where's Joe?"

"There he comes now with Maude and she's skinned her leg a little. I'm glad of it."

Miss Fielding hurried over to Joe and conferred with him in excited whispers. Joe appeared equally upset and hurried Maude off to shelter.

Miss Fielding summoned the girls and gave some rapid instructions.

"There's a great deal that you don't understand and I can't explain now," she finished, "but I leave the camp in Ellen's charge. Joe and I must go down to the village at once."

They rode off a little later in Joe's wagon, Miss Fielding greatly perturbed and Joe driving like mad.

"Now," said Edna, "you can see for yourself how strangely she acts. And look at what she said. Didn't I tell you she knows more about it than she said. That's evident." But the faith of the girls remained unshaken.

It was a wildly excited group that sat down to

breakfast. Afterward Mabel appeared in the camp kitchen with a huge basket.

"Are you going down to the jail with me, Edna Holmes?" she whispered.

"No," said Edna defiantly, "I'm not. Why should I?"

"It's your own grandfather," hissed Mabel in reproof. "Don't you care?"

"Grandfather and I are not friends," said Edna, coloring. "I — I don't speak to him at all. Besides, I've got to stay with Ida. She's crying again. And she's all excited."

"You're a wicked girl," said Mabel, "for not speaking to your own grandfather, but you really ought to stay with Ida. She's in a dreadful state."

She laid a napkin in the bottom of the basket and began to hustle excitedly about.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Edna.

"Haven't you ever read about the way people take baskets of food to the prisoners?" demanded Mabel darkly. "I'm going down to that jail to take Nora and Grandfather Holmes rations and a file if I can get one into a loaf of bread. I doubt if I can, for Marion baked it and it wasn't a great success. It's sort of hard and funny. But I'll get

a file in somehow and he can file away the bars and get away at the dark of the moon. It's a most terrible thing and I don't understand it at all, but a Holmes can't stay in jail, Edna. My father would never forgive me if I didn't do something desperate to get your grandfather out. I'll lay a sheet in the bottom of the basket and then he can tear it into strips and let himself out of the jail window unless it's on the ground floor. I'm glad it isn't father. He's so fat he'd break any sort of rope. It's a fearful responsibility to me — what with Ida down and out and you not speaking to the poor old man. It really ought to be one of his granddaughters setting forth bravely to save his life like this, but I'll do the best I can and take him food and files and things. May, gather up everything we didn't eat for breakfast and help me pack the basket."

Awed by Mabel's terrible facility for scheming, the girls mutely followed her orders, with the result that when the basket was quite packed, there wasn't a girl who could lift it.

"Well," said Mabel, mopping her forehead, "we'll have to lighten it up a bit. They have to do that to balloons sometimes too. There's four

loaves of bread that can come out. It's that fearful bread Marion baked that makes the basket weigh so heavy. No — not that loaf — I've got a file in that. June drilled a hole in it with a brace and bit and we stuffed the holes at either end with cotton. Seems to me I ought to get by the marshal with that. But listen, girls. If by an chance I do get into some dreadful mess and have to spend the night in jail, don't anybody telegraph my father. He's fearfully fat and if he ever had a fit he might die."

Mabel lifted the basket and started off.

"It's no use," she groaned, "I can't carry it. Nobody could unless he had a derrick for an arm. May, I've got an inspiration. You go put a saddle on Maude and we'll pack all this stuff on her back. Likely she'll make considerable fuss over her skinned leg and pretend to limp, but I never trust Maude's ailments. Then I can lead her down to the village."

Thus it was that Mabel finally set off, leading Maude, who resembled some grotesque species of pack mule gone lame from overloading.

"I know very well we ought not let Mabel go," said Ellen flatly, "but there's no stopping her

once she gets started. She's so excited that you've simply got to let her have her own way. Now, girls, we've got to settle down and get the camp work done. That's all there is to it. Edna, you stay with Ida and see if there's anything at all she wants. And June and Marion and May can help me with the dishes. We ought to have the camp in perfect order by the time Miss Fielding gets back."

The girls worked diligently, but at noon Miss Fielding had not yet appeared. Nor had Mabel and Joe. The girls were pitched by now to a terrible tension of expectancy.

At three a cloud of dust appeared down the road and Mabel emerged riding furiously on Maude's back. When at last she thundered into camp, her face was fiery red and her eyes shining with excitement.

"I've been telegraphing all over the world," she said, "and running about and quarreling with the marshal. And would you believe it, when I struck the village Maude looked so sort of foolish and limped so that a crowd of boys began to follow me and jeer and Maude kicked at one and I *was* in a state. By the time I got to the jail most of the

village was with me. And do you know, Edna, Miss Fielding seems to know your grandfather awfully well and he doesn't seem to care at all because he's in jail. He simply looked at Miss Fielding so sort of comical and she looked back at him every once in a while and then they'd both get to laughing so they could hardly stand up. Nora's the only one who seems to care and she quarrels horribly with the marshal. She's fearfully grouchy and says none of her family were ever in jail before. I don't quite understand it all yet, but it seems that somehow or other Grandfather Holmes had a whole sheaf of letters from every one of our fathers and those letters gave him permission to come into camp and take our clothes — I don't know why — and the marshal put on his specs and read them and said it was a darned funny business, *by Cracky.* Seems Grandfather Holmes has been living in the haunted hut all summer and Joe knew, and Nora and Miss Fielding, though Miss Fielding didn't know about the clothes — that was a mystery to her too — Get me a drink somebody or I'll burst. Ellen, get Maude! She's off again!"

They caught Maude at the edge of the woods and tied her up.

"What about the file?" demanded Ellen.

"Would you believe it?" said Mabel in outraged accents. "That marshal with the funny whiskers put on his specs again and went snooping through the basket and he pulled the cotton out of the loaf of bread with the file in and he said: 'What's all this cotton?' I told him with a lot of dignity that it was merely meant to stop up some holes Marion had baked in the bread by mistake; and then he stuck his horrid old dirty finger in and drew out the file, and, My! what a lecture he did give me! He waved his finger under my nose and there was some chance for a while that I'd either be hung or have to go to jail for assisting a prisoner to escape, for he said that's the worst offense there is. There didn't seem to be any way out of it, but Miss Fielding came along and I don't know what she said but she did get me off. Likely she looked so tired and warm he felt sorry for her. And then, besides, I'd told him what a fuss my father would make if he did put me in jail and that seemed to impress him. After I got off, then I began to ride around and

send telegrams to everybody's father and lots of other folks and then I'd have to wait at the station for the answers and the marshal would read all of these and shake his head. He was the most stubborn man I ever saw. And then some important body of men in the village had a meeting and in the midst of it all Nora stepped on the marshal's corn purposely and there was such a hullabaloo that I went into hysterics and they had to send for the doctor. He made me lie down for a terribly long time in his office and said I was over-excited and that stout people should try never to get so excited. That made me furious. Just imagine calling me stout after all the weight I've lost. I told him a few things and when he wasn't looking I escaped out of his window and tore a whole vine off the back of his house with my foot, getting out. I found Maude tied to a clothes-pole in his back yard and when I got back to the jail there was a big, handsome man in a great big motor car and everybody was kow-towing to him and he was laughing himself nearly blue in the face. Seems that he was one of the men I'd telegraphed to, though I never looked at the names, 'cept father's and Mr. Holmes', and

he was spending his vacation about six miles from here. By and by your grandfather came out and then the big man in the car shook hands with him and they laughed some more. They took Nora to the station — I followed on Maude, so I know that's where they went — and they put her on a train. And do you know, she was still mad. Well, Miss Fielding was in the car too, and they all kept looking back at me and smiling, and after they got Nora off, the handsome big man pinched Miss Fielding's cheek and smiled and they all shook hands and after they'd taken Miss Fielding back to Joe's wagon, the car shot off with your grandfather in it — and he said bless his soul he was glad to be out of it. And what do you think? " Mabel's voice lowered impressively. " Miss Fielding said to me — ' Mabel, do you know who that rescuer of ours is? ' and when I said ' no,' she said: ' Well, that's the governor of the state — he's my uncle and a very great friend of Grandfather Holmes. It's a mighty lucky thing he was spending his summer so near here or the dear old man might have had a troublesome time of it! ' Do you know, girls, I'm so excited that I just have to keep pinching myself to keep calm."

CHAPTER XX

IDA

But Mabel's curiosity, like that of the others, was fated not to be satisfied immediately. Miss Fielding returned to camp with Joe at sunset, tired and warm, with a message to the effect that Grandfather Holmes greatly preferred to do his own explaining. There the matter was left.

Only Edna had some glimmering conception of what it all meant and that night she lay, flushed and resentful, fitting the singular pieces of the mystery all together.

"It's been grandfather's scheme from the beginning — this camp," she thought indignantly. "I'm sure of it. He planned the camp and spurred father on to making us come. I know father never would have thought of it by himself and then — then grandfather took our dresses so we'd have to wear the Camp Fire things. Oh, dear — I — I hate it all. I won't stay here — I won't! I won't." Which was very childish and

silly for a girl who fancied herself a real grown up. And Edna lay still, clenching her hands and brooding over the wasted summer.

"I'll never forgive grandfather," she decided bitterly, "and I'll never forgive Miss Fielding. She's made Ida different to me and I won't stay here. I won't! I won't! I — I never was so unhappy before in my life. It — it's a disgrace, too, to have grandfather in jail like that — "

All the bitterness and rancor of the summer welled up passionately in Edna's heart and she cried very hard into her pillow. When the first wild wave of temptation came, however, she could not afterward remember. Certainly it was definitely formed in her mind when she sat up and stared about her in some excitement.

"I — I don't have to stay," she whispered to herself. "I — I can run away and go home. I've got money enough and father wouldn't send me back once I got home and told him how I hate it up here. I — I could always manage father until grandfather came. And if I go in the night nobody will see me and I'm not a bit afraid. And even if I am afraid I'd rather go through it all than stay here any longer. Maybe I could get some night

train home, and if I can't there's one early in the morning."

The girl rose in growing excitement, furtively dressed herself and stole out of the tent. She glanced once at Ida. It was too dark to see, but bending over the bed, she found that the younger girl was sleeping heavily, tired out from the excitement of the day.

"Unless something frightens her and she wants to come into my bed," thought Edna, "she won't know I'm gone until morning."

She stole on hurriedly toward the woods. The night was very dark, the road to the village rough and deeply rutted. A jagged dart of lightning flashed across the lake.

Edna shivered.

"It's very dark," she whispered, "and I'll have to hurry. It's going to storm. Oh, I hope the storm doesn't wake Ida and frighten her. She'll surely want to come into bed with me and she'll find I'm gone and rouse the camp."

A wave of hysterical fear and dread swept through the girl's body as she ran wildly down the lake road. The lightning came again, blinding her, and a great lump came into her throat.

How wicked the lightning seemed and how very lonely the road!

"But I can't go back," she said, "I can't! I can't! I hate it all and I've been so unhappy and lonely. Ida doesn't love me the same and the girls all seem so much happier when I'm not with them and — and I know Miss Fielding wishes I wasn't in camp, and grandfather doesn't approve of me and he's made father think I ought to be different — "

Catching her breath sharply, Edna ran on. Thunder rumbled off above the forest. The girl redoubled her speed, startled by a vivid blaze of lightning across the lake. Losing her way for an instant in the darkness that followed the lightning, she stumbled heavily over a log and fell face downward, her arm doubling beneath her. A terrible pain shot along her arm and shoulder — then merciful unconsciousness blotted the world of night and storm from her vision.

When she first became conscious again of the pain, the rain was beating heavily in her face. Thunder was crashing wildly over the lake with heavy reverberations among the hills, and the lightning glittered wickedly in her eyes.

Edna tried to rise, but sank back with a moan of pain.

"I must have broken my arm," was her first frightened thought. "Oh, Ida, Ida!"

For in this hour of pain and fear she could only think of Ida's comforting arms and Ida's sweetness. There had been no mother in Edna's life since early childhood. Now her heart turned hotly toward the blue-eyed gentle little sister she had dominated for so many years.

A light glimmered off among the trees. Edna summoned all her strength and cried out. The lantern bobbed. The girls were all out hunting her.

She called again — and then she was conscious that there was a string of lanterns all bobbing about in the rain and all coming nearer. She closed her eyes, great drops of sweat standing out on her forehead from the pain of the broken arm. When she opened them again, still a little dazed by the pain, the face bending over her, framed in the dim light of the rain-splashed lantern, was the face of Ida.

"Oh, Edna, Edna," sobbed the younger girl, "you're hurt, dear — I know by your face. I'm

so sorry — so very sorry." She cried and kissed her sister; then something that had lain buried beneath Ida's shy timidity flashed in her eyes. Edna needed her — the call was very strong. Instead of the little timid, fearful Ida, a white-faced young girl, quiet, self-assured, every instinct ready to save her sister, spoke a few hurried directions to the girls behind her and turned again to Edna.

"It — it's just my arm," quavered Edna weakly, finding an utter confidence in the brave, sweet, tearful eyes above her. "If — you'll — help — me — up — I — I think I can get back to camp."

It was Ida, her face deathly white, who helped her sister to her feet; it was Ida who quietly took the leadership of the girls upon herself and told them what to do; it was Ida who put her arm gently around Edna's waist and led her back to camp.

"Let her alone," directed Miss Fielding. "Ida knows exactly what she wants to do and she's doing it well. I've always thought that some hour such as this would call forth the real girl — and it has. Do whatever she tells you."

"Where's Joe?" said Mabel. "He must go for the doctor." But Joe was not to be found. When Ida, stealing to her sister's bed with the first wild thunderclap, had given the alarm, he and Miss Fielding had by mutual arrangement gone in different directions.

"We can't wait," said Ida decidedly. "Miss Fielding, will you help Edna into bed and stay with her? I — " But Ida did not finish her sentence. With a queer little sob she ran wildly out of the tent. An instant later there was the thunder of hoof-beats and Ida was on her way to the village on Maude.

"Oh, she mustn't go, she mustn't!" cried Miss Fielding frantically. "She's so timid and afraid. Ida! Ida!" But Ida was gone. In the glare of lightning they saw her riding down the lake road and through the trees, her hair flapping stormily behind her in the wind.

Bending with every twig that brushed her face, Ida rode bravely on. The shadows fairly seemed to leap and bar the way at times when the lightning just before had been very bright. Once the girl covered her eyes with her hands and prayed.

"Oh, God," she whispered pitifully, "help me

through the forest and the storm. I'm a little frightened but it's all for Edna — Edna! Edna!" Breathing the word like an invocation against the spirits of the stormy night, Ida rode on.

Her heart thumped heavily against her chest; there was a great lump in her throat and a singing in her ears. There were times when her fear made her bite her lips until they bled, but she always clenched her hands fiercely and rode on. It seemed hours somehow before the lights of the village loomed ahead — a faint twinkle here and there, for the hour was late. Ida rode up to the doctor's and pounded on the door.

A window opened above her.

"Oh, hurry, hurry, please!" she called, half sobbing. "My sister has broken her arm and she's been lying along the road in the storm — "

Then at a kind, motherly voice which said: "Dear — dear! Son, it's a little girl!" Ida's tears came very fast and she sank down crying on the doorstep.

From inside came the sound of hurrying feet; then the door opened and the doctor's mother helped Ida gently to her feet.

"Bless your heart, dear," she exclaimed;

" surely you didn't ride through all this storm alone? You did! Where did you come from? "

" The camp up in the woods," said Ida.

Three miles in the midnight dark and storm! The doctor's kindly old mother looked a little incredulous. " She's ridden down from the lake," she whispered to her son who hurried into the room, struggling into his coat as he came. " I can hardly believe it."

The young doctor glanced keenly at the girl's pale face.

" You'd better lie down here," he said kindly, " and let me go on. Don't you think so? "

But Ida shook her head.

" No — no," she said quietly. " I'm all right now — truly I am. I'll go back with you so you won't miss the road and be longer. It's just — Oh, hurry, hurry, please! "

The young doctor hurried indeed! He hurried into his hat and he hurried out of the house and he hurried Ida into a buggy and they all hurried back over the stormy road to camp, leaving Maude behind in the doctor's barn.

" You're a plucky little girl," said the doctor kindly as the lights of Pine-Tree Camp flashed

through the trees ahead. "I never dreamed so young a girl could be so brave."

"I — I was never brave before in my life," said Ida wistfully, "but — but it isn't half so hard as I always thought it must be. I — I think maybe I'll know how to be brave again."

So, through her love for Edna, Ida found the hidden spark beneath.

CHAPTER XXI

THE INVALID

There was more than a broken arm to fight in the days that followed. Edna had lain unconscious in the rain and wind longer than she knew. There came a night when the young doctor looked a little grave and shook his head.

"I'm — sorry," he said simply, "but — "

Miss Fielding caught his arm.

"What is it? " she said. "She's very ill? "

"Pneumonia," said the doctor. "She doesn't seem quite so rugged as the rest of your girls."

"No," said Miss Fielding sorrowfully, "she wouldn't be. She was not quite so active."

"She ought to have a nurse," went on the doctor, frowning, "but there isn't a woman in the village I can honestly recommend and by the time you could get one for her from the city — well, you know how pneumonia is. It's always very quick either one way or the other."

He started at a footfall behind him and wheeled. Ida stood by his side, her face deathly white.

"You mean," she whispered, "you mean she may not get better?"

"Hardly that," said the doctor kindly. "It's just that we must be very, very careful and she ought to have a nurse—"

Ida's eyes met his bravely.

"I—I can do that," she said. "Miss Fielding has taught me so much. I was to get honor beads that way. A Camp Fire Girl knows how to care for the sick, doesn't she, Miss Fielding?"

"Yes," said Miss Fielding, but she turned abruptly away. For something in the wistful courage of Ida's blue eyes had made her choke. Ida had not cried or trembled as the timid little Ida of a week ago might have done; she had merely seized the doctor's hand and glanced at him in piteous appeal.

"You'll help me," she begged. "Oh, you'll help me save her life?"

"Yes," said the young doctor huskily, "of course. We'll all do what we can."

Through the blur of fevered days that followed, Edna was hazily conscious of a gentle voice, of a quick and quiet step that never faltered, of a hand

that was always cool and comforting. To whom the hand belonged she did not know. She only knew that its every touch was a gentle caress.

Then there came a day not quite so hazy and queer, when she opened her eyes and saw beside her a trim, slender little figure in a white apron.

Ida? No — there was something in this girl's face quite different from Ida. . . . Still there was a resemblance. . . . This girl was merely a little older — a little more assured, and Ida was always so childish and timid.

Edna smiled a little as she met the girl's eyes and instantly the girl came to the bedside and kissed her.

"Oh, Edna, dear," she said with a great sigh of relief, "I'm so glad you're better!"

So it *was* Ida! Edna puzzled so for an instant that she felt very tired; then with a sigh of comfort as the cool, gentle hand rested for a minute on her forehead, she went to sleep.

Somehow her days seemed full of dreams now. She fancied once or twice that she had heard her father's voice, grave and worried — that one other time there was some whispered dispute and Ida had stamped her foot and flashed fire, and that

they had all filed forth from the tent at last and left her to a long vigil that the doctor had fancied too severe a tax upon her strength.

Slowly — very slowly, Edna drifted into convalescence. One by one the girls were permitted to peep within the tent and depart — always at the bidding of the watchful little nurse in cap and apron.

Once Edna put out her hand.

"Mousie," she whispered, "have — have you been taking care of me all by yourself?"

"No, indeed," said Ida cheerfully. "Every single girl has helped me, and Miss Fielding most of all."

"You care a great deal for me, don't you?" went on Edna wistfully.

Ida smiled and bent and kissed her, but though for an instant her hand touched her throat she did not cry. Ida, too, was learning. And Edna, watching the business-like little hands that measured medicine and patted the pillows and smoothed her hair, suddenly felt a vague conviction that Ida, standing firmly upon her own two feet, could love her just as much as Ida, timid and yielding.

"I used to scold and order her around," she thought remorsefully. "Maybe I — shouldn't have done it."

Day by day now Edna's eyes grew brighter — she smiled oftener, and once of her own accord she sat up and waved to the girls out by the camp fire. The young doctor smiled and said that the danger was past.

June came with her guitar and played softly outside the tent, the girls took turns relieving Ida, Miss Fielding came now and read long, delightful tales of the olden times, to which Edna listened with her eyes closed and a faint color in her cheeks. The camp was unremitting in its attentions to the invalid. Ellen cooked countless delicacies to tempt her appetite, and then as the girl grew even stronger, June's class in folk-dancing gave some wonderful exhibitions with the invalid sitting up in bed and the tent-flaps up.

Nights, too, the girls clustered about the tent and sang the Camp Fire songs. Somehow the whole activity of Pine-Tree Camp had begun to center about Edna's tent.

"Oh, Ida," she whispered one night as the final strains of the "Good Night Song" floated out

on the still night air, "how good they all are and — and Miss Fielding most of all. I don't deserve it."

"Hush!" said Ida, laying her fingers gently on her sister's lips. "Isn't the Camp Fire ideal one of service? We're all helping you to get better — and the best part of it is that we all want to!"

Mabel came one day and sent Ida off for a nap. Fanning her charge, Mabel as usual bubbled over with enthusiasm.

"Isn't Ida absolutely wonderful?" she exclaimed. "I never saw anything like it in my life. Miss Fielding says she never saw such a transformation in anybody either. Seems as if she just needed some great responsibility to call it out. The doctor does nothing but talk about it. I sort of keep out of his way though. You know I escaped from his back window one day and ripped his wistaria off with one foot. I don't just know how he feels about it. Do you know, Edna, Ida lately always knows just exactly what she wants to do, and, 'pon my word, in a quiet way that nobody seems to mind — she's almost bossy."

"Ida!" exclaimed Edna. "You mean *Ida?*"

"I mean Ida and nobody else," said Mabel emphatically. "My, my, Edna, I am glad you're better. One night I lay awake most all night and I prayed for you to get better and I had a fearful headache in the morning."

There was a terrible earnestness in Mabel's voice.

Edna caught her hand.

"It — it's nice of you to care," she said faintly.

"Jinks!" said Mabel indignantly, "we all care. If anything had happened to you I was going to drown myself. I had it all planned."

Edna laughed a little. It was so like Mabel's heavy tragedy — but it was delightful too.

"Didn't you know," demanded Mabel, "that Ida rode down to the village for the doctor that night in all the storm all by herself and brought him back?"

"No-o-o-o," said Edna.

"And she wouldn't have anyone else take care of you and she thought of everything and telegraphed for your father and he came rushing up scared to death and your grandfather's off on a motoring trip with the governor and they couldn't

get him and, Edna Holmes,'' finished Mabel, her eyes very bright, '' you can thank your sister for your life.''

'' Mabel Wing,'' said a quiet voice that made Mabel jump, '' you're talking too much. Out with you. Ellen wants you to help her peel potatoes.''

Mabel flushed guiltily. It was Ida.

'' Do you know,'' she admitted, '' I do talk an awful lot. I notice it myself.''

One warm, bright sunset the girls carried Edna over to the dining tent and held a big dinner of celebration. There were songs and speeches and cheers and Edna cried. Something was stirring in the girl's heart that she did not understand.

'' They're all so good, so very good,'' she kept repeating, '' and Miss Fielding's eyes are so pretty and kind they make me want to cry. I — I don't deserve any of it.''

'' Oh, Ida,'' she whispered late that night as Ida was tucking her comfortably in for the night, '' Mabel told me how sweet and brave you've been — ''

'' Mabel,'' interrupted Ida severely, '' talks entirely too much. But I don't notice that she told you how good she's been herself. Once when

Maude had escaped and Joe was off somewhere with his wagon and we all thought you were getting worse, she ran three miles in the burning sun to get the doctor; and the next day she was sick. All of the girls have been good. Ellen's always cooking something new to tempt your appetite and June played you to sleep with her guitar many a night when you were restless. May's helped me, and Marion's kept a great bunch of wildflowers right near the tent so you could always see something pretty when you opened your eyes. Hadn't you noticed? "

" Yes," said Edna. " And — and Miss Fielding too — she's read me all those wonderful stories — "

" Miss Fielding is a dear," said Ida. " If it hadn't been for her I'd never have been able to keep up. She somehow makes me feel strong and brave and cheerful just to look at her. She sat up whole nights with you, Edna, when the doctor said I had to get some sleep. And she's done everything in the world to help us both."

A shadow darkened the canvas where the lantern threw its light.

It was Miss Fielding.

"Everything all right, Ida?" she called cheerfully.

"Yes," said Ida.

Miss Fielding bent over the bed and kissed Edna on the forehead.

"Good night, little invalid," she said gently. "The girls' fun didn't tire you out?"

"No, no, no!" said Edna. Then with a sob she buried her face in Miss Fielding's shoulder.

"Oh, Miss Fielding," she said, "I — I can't stand it any more. I've — been so horrid all summer and you — you've all been so good to me — "

Miss Fielding held her very tight.

"Don't think about it now, Edna," she said. "That's all past. We're going to begin all over again."

And Edna, sobbing forth passionate words of remorse and resolutions for the future, reflected Miss Fielding pityingly, was after all only a little girl — a tired, repentant little girl who had lost her grown-up airs down the dark lane of sickness. The real "grown up" was the quiet, gentle little sister in the cap and apron.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CAMP'S GUESTS

Best of all, Edna's good resolutions did not wane. They strengthened as the roses brightened in her cheeks. She longed to be up and busy — to join with the girls in the congenial activity of the day, so they might know how truly grateful she was. And with the memory of the camp's kindness and forbearance spurring her on to acute remorse, she was gentler and sweeter to everyone.

"I declare," said Mabel Wing, "I never guessed what an all-around fine girl Edna Holmes could be. Of course she isn't quite so grown up and she doesn't worry so much about her clothes — that seems to have melted out of her while she was sick, but I don't know but what I like her better for that. And do you know, to-morrow she's to help Ellen get the dinner. She made Miss Fielding promise. I never supposed she'd do anything like that after the way she talked, did you? "

With a zeal that was at first a severe tax upon her strength, Edna plunged eagerly into the house-

keeping life of the camp. And now indeed the busy machinery of camp good-fellowship fairly hummed, with never a single discordant note to mar its perfect harmony. The summer was waning. Here and there already in the forest there was a scarlet leaf and the girls fell to planning a big camp fire celebration to which fathers and mothers would be invited. Here it was that Edna's genius for leadership came helpfully to the fore. She was untiring in her plans for entertaining the camp's guests. Once — early in the summer — Grandfather Holmes had said that when Edna made up her mind to do a thing she could do it better and more quickly than most. She was proving it now. Her energy, her resource, were invaluable. She it was who drew up endless programs of events, menus and lists of committees for certain tasks, and kept Pine-Tree Camp humming with enthusiasm.

"I declare," said Ellen, "I never knew we could do so many different things until Edna put them down on paper. I'm so proud of the girls I feel like cheering."

"Better be proud of yourself," put in Mabel good-humoredly. "You're the smartest thing in

camp.'' Which pleased Ellen mightily and proved to the ears of a certain guardian that the good-fellowship in her camp was loyally unselfish.

'' Have you noticed how neat Edna keeps her tent, Miss Fielding? '' Ida whispered a little later. '' I never knew her to be so neat with her things before. Grandfather will be delighted. I think I'll write to him.'' She stood very quiet for a minute; then her face glowed. Bending over, she whispered something to Miss Fielding, who nodded — and straightway there was another mystery in camp, though no one suspected it for many a day.

And then as the day of celebration drew near — such cooking and washing and ironing and scrubbing — such polishing of pots and pans to dazzle parental eyes, such written plans for entertainment — such committee meetings and enthusiasm and such tired and happy girls!

The festal day dawned bright and clear. Flags flew from every tent and billowed in the breeze. Off to the east loomed a line of guest-shelters built of boughs and grasses by the girls themselves. A flag flew from every one. Chinese lanterns swayed among the trees, where Mabel — her

face very red — was hammering away as if her life depended upon it. Mabel's genius for carpentry had seemed to increase with the loss of every pound.

Early in the afternoon Joe, looking very festal in a scarlet tie and a new suit, drove the girls down to the village to meet the train. A huge stage gayly decorated with flags and ribbons would convey the guests from the train to the camp.

Chug-a-chug! Chug-a-chug! Chug-a-chug! came the train at last after an interminable wait, and the girls fairly bubbled with excitement and enthusiasm. What would May's father say when he saw her cheeks — and Mabel's when he saw her waist line — and — But at last here they all were, piling forth from the Pullman with many a smile and wave. Here was Mabel's father, a great, stout, ruddy, good-humored man, and her mother; Ellen's father, thin and brown; Mr. Holmes, with genuine anxiety, scanning his older daughter's face for evidences of returning health; and the mothers and fathers of June and Marion and May, all in a state of good humor and expectancy impossible to describe.

And how that crowd of fathers and mothers

stared! For this tanned, ruddy, vigorous, cheerful band of girls in Camp Fire blouses and rough skirts was surely very different from the fashionable young ladies they had packed off into the forest months before.

"I can't believe it," said Mabel's father, puffing a little as he climbed into the stage. "Where in the world, Mabel, is the rest of you?"

"A pound on every milestone," exulted Mabel and then in a spasm of wholly justified pride: "But just you look at May Hollins, dad. I did some of that too."

Mr. and Mrs. Hollins were already staring at the plump and rosy little girl who had run laughing into their arms.

"It can't be," said Mr. Hollins, shaking his head. "No, sir, this isn't my little girl. I know it!" And Mrs. Hollins wiped her eyes and then everybody kissed everybody else and there was a jubilee!

Everybody seemed to be talking at once. Edna's father was telling somebody else's father of his fright when his daughter had pneumonia and a broken arm — and how wonderfully Ida had nursed her. Mr. Tuttle was proudly exhibiting a

picture of June and her folk-dancing class; and Mr. and Mrs. Ralston were speaking of Marion's art course. Altogether there never was such another parental jubilee or such hearty congratulations for Miss Fielding, who felt a great secret satisfaction in their pride. Parents needed awakening once in a while too, and surely they were getting it. Edna's illness had pretty thoroughly awakened her father; and the Camp Fire achievements of the other girls had brought more than one thoughtless mother to a realization of many things.

Off rode the stage up the dusty hill, and off rode Joe's wagon beside it, with the girls calling messages across to their guests. Thus they all wound into camp, where Edna radiantly led a tour of inspection to show off the camp decorations and the shelters made of boughs and the shining pots and pans in Ellen's kitchen.

Then Edna blew a trumpet and produced a program and the sports of the afternoon began. There was swimming and diving and a water game. Then June's class did some picturesque folk-dancing and June herself sang some folk-songs to a guitar accompaniment. May recited a

very tragic poem laboriously composed by Mabel Wing when her back had been lame from over-zealous carpentering. Ida rode around camp bareback on Maude, whose ears were festooned with red ribbons, to prove that her old timidity was gone for good. And everybody cheered.

Now in the midst of all this delightful excitement, there came a faint chugging that seemed to grow louder and louder by the minute and as it grew louder two very scarlet spots appeared in Ida's cheeks. She glanced at Miss Fielding and Miss Fielding smiled and nodded. Everybody began to stare in the direction of the chugging.

An automobile appeared at the foot of the hill-road — it climbed the hill — it rolled into camp and forth from its shining tonneau climbed a handsome old man with whiskers, and another man not quite so old.

Mabel nudged Ellen.

"Ellen Birch," she whispered, "It's Grandfather Holmes and — and whether you'll believe me or not — that other man is the Governor of the United States!"

"There's no such person," said Ellen flatly.

"Well, the governor of the state then," said

Mabel indignantly. "You know very well that when I get fearfully excited I talk queer. And — look — look at Edna's face."

For Edna's face had turned wildly scarlet and she had turned as though she would run off in a panic to her tent. It was Ida who stopped her.

"Edna," she said, "it — it's all a surprise. I — I wrote to grandpa — but I — I didn't know the governor would come. Won't — won't you go over and speak to them for my sake?"

And with the memory of the loyal little nurse who had watched beside her bedside, what could Edna do? And, besides, Grandfather Holmes had been right; already the girl's conscience had bitterly reproached her. She glanced swiftly at Ida — then at Miss Fielding's sweet, encouraging eyes, and strength came to Edna to humble her foolish pride. She went bravely down to meet her grandfather and held out her hand.

"Grandfather," she choked, "I — I'm sorry — " It was quite enough. The old man swung her into the air with his sturdy arms.

"Bless your heart, child," he said, "of course you are. Governor, this is my granddaughter —

Edna — and you haven't a smarter little lady anywhere in your own family."

The governor swept off his hat and bowed profoundly.

Now almost before the governor had finished bowing there was a startling diversion. Mabel had gathered the girls together and was wildly beating time with a crooked stick and out over the lake in tribute to the camp's distinguished guest, who first looked a little startled and then laughed and waved his hat and bowed, floated the strains of the "Star-Spangled Banner," with everybody singing.

CHAPTER XXIII

GRANDFATHER HOLMES

It was a merry dinner party that sat at dusk beneath the lantern-spangled trees, lingering over its coffee. The governor had been guest of honor, Miss Fielding the hostess and the girls in caps and aprons had demurely served.

Miss Fielding rose and smiled.

"It doesn't seem that I need welcome you formally," she said. "Surely the energy and enthusiasm of the girls have proved to you how very welcome you all are, but I do want you to know that the table upon which you are dining was built by Mabel Wing and so were the benches — " Here Mabel's father looked thunderstruck, nudged his wife and startled everybody by bursting into a loud cheer in which eventually everyone joined him. "The soup and the bread were made by May Hollins; Ida washed and ironed the table cloth and napkins; Ellen roasted the chickens and made the salad; June baked the potatoes and boiled the corn; Marion made the little water-color place-

cards, gathered the flowers and decorated the table; Edna made the coffee and dessert — indeed, every bit of the dinner we've all enjoyed so much was cooked and served by the girls. Every flag and lantern was strung up by their nimble fingers; every sleeping shelter of boughs and leaves was made by them, and I'm sure you'll rest as comfortably as fairies ever rested in a forest. I've merely sat by and watched and I'm very proud indeed of their work."

Again Mr. Wing cheered and everybody clapped and Grandfather Holmes wiped his glasses and said, "Bless my soul, I simply can't believe it! Miss Fielding must be a witch — I've suspected so all along!" And then suddenly he was on his feet and there was a general hush. Moved by a common impulse of expectancy, the girls gathered about the table.

"Some time ago," said Grandfather Holmes, his eyes twinkling a little, "before my very good friend the governor carried me off in his motor, I promised to make an explanation to the girls of Pine-Tree Camp, and surely no time is better than now when before me I see the fulfillment of all my hopes and plans."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"Now," whispered Mabel Wing in great excitement, "at last we're going to hear the real story of those green beads and the haunted hut and the robbery and the kidnapping. It's just about time we did. If it hadn't been for Edna running off and tumbling down in a thundershower, and everything getting so exciting in camp, I'd have died of curiosity long ago. Ellen, the governor wants more coffee. Hurry up so he won't hold up the speech."

The governor accepted his coffee with an expansive smile. Plainly he was enjoying himself immensely.

Grandfather Holmes cleared his throat.

"Just where to begin," he said slowly, "is a little difficult. I might begin by saying that I am an old-fashioned man and that I like an old-fashioned girl who's getting ready for a girl's old-fashioned job of wife and mother, but I imagine most of you know by now my views on that subject and therefore we can pass by it quickly. I presume too it isn't necessary to remind my friends here that I have lived abroad for several years. When I left America my granddaughters were just

sweet, bright-eyed little kiddies with every promise of development into splendid women. When I returned, I found — well, I must confess the ideals for girlhood seemed to have changed. I found," said Grandfather Holmes, gazing squarely at the group of girls beneath the trees, " that the paramount consideration in the lives of my granddaughters and their friends was — clothes. I found that it was no longer considered an essential part of a girl's education that she should know the simple, homely tasks in which the old-fashioned girl excelled, even if it was merely for the purpose of proving to her servants that she knew a little more than they."

It was not an easy story to tell but Grandfather Holmes cleared his throat again and went sturdily on.

He did not speak of Edna's disorderly habits or her willful rebellion. He said nothing of her arrogance to the servants or her domineering ways with Ida, and Edna, listening with burning cheeks, felt very grateful. He did speak, however, of the lack of good-fellowship among Edna's friends and of the fretful jealousy and bickering that so frequently resulted in quarrels.

"I am speaking very plainly," he said simply, "but it must be so; and surely this fine, splendid band of young women will forgive me for my reference to those foolish ghosts of themselves that they have wisely relegated to the past. I was truly appalled at the state of things I found. Looking ahead I was still more appalled at the future. What sort of women could evolve from such unfortunate beginnings? What sort of wives and mothers? My son was a very busy man —" Edna's father looked a trifle guilty. "To that I attribute the fact that he did not seem aware of the wrong road upon which his girls were traveling. I did, and I began to cast about in my mind for the means of changing their ideals and ambitions. It was, you will agree, a pretty big job.

"Now, in crossing from England, I had met Miss Fielding and we had talked of her interest in the Camp Fire work. She had told me much of a band of girls with whom she had worked the summer before — of the Camp Fire aim to prove that there is beauty and romance and adventure in ordinary life — that the outdoor life brings better health and better spirit — that girls, like men, need to learn team work, and that a knowl-

edge of the homeliest tasks brings honorable recognition and encouragement to the girl who is willing to learn — fascinating talk you see for an old man who loved the old-fashioned ways.

" Therefore, when I found how sadly my granddaughters were drifting away from the old ideals, I naturally thought of the Camp Fire work and Miss Fielding. First I visited certain fathers — " there was a general twinkling of parental eyes — " and I told them bluntly what I've said to-night — that the girls had unwholesome habits and unwholesome ideals — that they were a spoiled group that needed vigorous training and different viewpoints. They all agreed. I spoke of the Camp Fire work and the wholesome influence of a big camp in the woods and again they agreed but looked a little helpless. When I spoke of Miss Fielding, however, and satisfied them that a suitable guardian could do all the things I mentioned, their co-operation was assured. We had a fathers' meeting with an — er — officious grandfather presiding, and co-operation became real enthusiasm. Finally I spoke to Miss Fielding and I may say here that her instant interest was very gratifying and acceptable indeed.

" We became fellow-conspirators and equipped a camp up here in the heart of God's hills and though the girls little guessed it, there was, when they arrived, everything here for the correction of wrong ideals — sensible clothes and many another sensible thing to teach them how to work. From the very start we had the idea of forming a Camp Fire group as soon as possible. We did not dare, however, broach the subject too soon, for the girls were not then particularly receptive. How and when she managed to make them receptive I'll leave for Miss Fielding to tell.

" Now, in order that I might watch the success of my cherished scheme and keep in intimate touch with things, and partly because I too love the forest, I turned hermit and lived in an old hut back there in the woods that the villagers believed to be haunted. I cooked my own meals and tramped and fished and in order that I might not be discovered, Joe, who was in the secret from the start, spread the story of the ghost.

" I was fairly comfortable. Nora, who had been an old servant of mine for many years and therefore had no great faith in my cooking, smuggled to my door an occasional dish of her own making.

Joe brought up my mail and Miss Fielding kept me posted by means of letters which she hid in the hollow of a dead tree."

"How romantic," whispered Mabel Wing. "I'm just thrilled through and through."

"It seemed best that I should hold no direct communication with the camp, though many and many a time when the girls little guessed it, my eyes were on them. Once indeed I ventured too near and Nora was so afraid that someone had seen me that she made a vast to-do about shooing me off with a broom.

"Things somehow went very badly from the start. You can imagine my consternation when I learned that the girls had brought trunks upon trunks of foolish clothes with them and were turning my camp into a fashionable summer resort. Miss Fielding was in a quandary. The clothes had complicated things beyond endurance.

"It was then that my ideas began to be, I fear, slightly spectacular.

"The clothes must go, that I saw very clearly, if Miss Fielding was ever to eliminate the bickering and rivalry in camp. Therefore," Grandfather Holmes stroked his beard, "I turned

robber. I wrote to — er — certain fathers — " again the general twinkle and smile about the quiet table — " and begged permission to steal certain fashionable garments for which they had paid and therefore owned. It was readily granted and after a conference with Nora and Joe, I bided my time. This time I thought it best not to take Miss Fielding into my confidence and therefore when the clothes did ultimately disappear she was quite as startled as anyone else."

" You're an old reprobate! " exclaimed the governor, smiling. " I always knew it." At which there was a general laugh.

Grandfather Holmes admitted the charge and went on with his story.

" One night Nora happened to see the girls stealing forth into the woods on a ghost party. They carried baskets and Nora fancied they intended to be gone some time. She rose and dressed and ran all the way from camp to my hut. I went back with her and presently we had those troublesome frocks hidden away in the forest whence Nora and I by stealthy trips conveyed them to the hut."

" That's when she lost the green beads," whis-

pered Ellen, " and that's why she acted so queer. Did you ever! "

" By the time the rain came she was back in her tent and Miss Fielding was up to warn the girls of approaching storm. And Nora had some little difficulty explaining why she was up and dressed.

" The clothes eliminated, another difficulty presented itself. It was part of our plans that every girl in camp should learn to cook and sweep and wash and iron and scrub — they're healthy, wholesome things to know — but never was there a group of girls more reluctant to learn. Something spectacular was plainly necessary again and this time Nora, the mainstay of the camp, disappeared and came to live at the haunted hut, where she cooked for me. This time I made a very serious mistake in not taking Miss Fielding into our confidence, for the whole thing worried her and she began to look about for another cook. Thanks to Joe she didn't find one. Joe is a wonderful schemer. He feigned ignorance of the simplest task and discouraged any possible applicants for the post of camp-cook, with the result that the girls put their shoulders to the wheel in

time of emergency and came through with colors flying! And Miss Fielding, thanks to a hint or so from Joe, very soon saw that Nora's disappearance was a Godsend — not altogether accidental."

Grandfather Holmes ended with a humorous reference to the ridiculous dilemma from which the governor had rescued him and when he had finished, Miss Fielding told a story of Camp Fire achievement that made every face in the lantern-glow shine with pride.

The governor rose and held aloft his second cup of coffee.

"Ladies and gentleman," he said, "I drink to the Camp Fire Girls and their guardian!"

Cups were raised in a twinkling and Miss Fielding, raising her own cup, laughed and rose.

"I drink," she said, "to Grandfather Holmes!"

And for some mysterious reason the girls all cheered.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAST COUNCIL FIRE

It was a peaceful moon that rose that night over Pine-Tree Camp. It whitened the flapping tents and seemed to linger with a softer brightness where the wood and kindling was laid for the last council fire. Among the lantern-spangled pines sat the guests of the camp, their eyes upon a slender Indian maid who was summoning her council together with the Camp Fire chant. A wind, laden with the smell of pine, swayed her ceremonial robe, and the moon, flashing over her bright beads and braided hair, made a soft halo of fire about her figure.

"'Pon my word," said the governor proudly, "my niece looks as young and pretty as any of your youngsters. My! My! What's all this?"

For, in answer to the call, a stately file of Indian maids in robes and beads and headbands were marching forth from the shadows to the music of June's guitar.

What young and eager faces and glowing eyes! What wonderfully embroidered ceremonial robes and what thongs of honor beads of every color! The march was a moving record of achievement. "Miss Fielding's ceremonial name is Wetamoo," whispered Grandfather Holmes. "Edna told me. Wetamoo was the beautiful woman sachem of the Wampanoags and Mabel named her."

Mabel halted and raised her hand aloft in the hand sign of fire.

Silently the guardian raised her own hand in recognition and Mabel passed on to her place by the fire. One by one the girls did likewise and when at last they were seated in a silent circle about the wood, Wetamoo lighted the fire by rubbing sticks together.

The blaze leaped up, painting the tents with restless shadows, and instantly in unison came a steady chorus of voices repeating the "Ode to Fire."

"'O Fire!
Long years ago when our fathers fought with
great animals you were their protection.
From the cruel cold of winter, you saved them.

When they needed food you changed the flesh of beasts into savory meat for them.
During all the ages your mysterious flame has been a symbol to them for Spirit.
So (to-night) we light our fire in remembrance of the Great Spirit who gave you to us.' "

With the last words the girls rose and now the steady chant of voices became a song.

"Wohelo for aye!" rang the girlish voices through the moonlit silence and Grandfather Holmes wiped his glasses and nodded his head and said very fervently: "Wohelo for aye!"

Wetamoo called the roll by ceremonial names and clearly across the flickering flame — symbol of home and forest — came the answer: "Kolah!" meaning "Friend!" finest of words in any tongue. And now June's name was Satinka — Magic Dancer. Marion's was Puppinshaas — Bird, in symbolic reference to the interest that had first helped her find herself. Ellen was Agokay, "I stick to it." May was Ogin — Rose, from the color in her cheeks. Mabel, sturdy, persistent Mabel, was Gash-kit-on — "I am a Winner." But "Mousie," Ida's name since childhood, had

somehow clung to her even in the council fire; and Edna's name — Bimodon — Miss Fielding hurried over as quickly as she could.

Mabel dramatically read the account of the last meeting, which related in verse contributed by every girl how all save Edna had taken the rank of Fire Gatherer, for honors won, at the last Council Fire held in the Green-corn Moon.

But the pleasantest time of all, thought Grandfather Holmes, was when each girl told of some kindness she had seen another do. And then came the awarding of honors, for Marion knew all about the planets and the seven constellations now and could tell their stories; May had brought up a cup from the bottom of the lake in eight feet of water; Ellen had concocted some wonderful ways in which to cook left-over meats and Mabel had built a table and benches and June had invented a dance — but the honors these busy girls had won were far too many to record. Suffice to say that there were red beads and blue ones, brown beads and green ones, yellow and flame-colored, and so many others to string upon thongs of leather, that Grandfather Holmes startled everyone by cheering at the most impressive point of the ceremony.

"Bimodon," said Miss Fielding at last, "is to take the rank of Fire-Maker to-day."

Edna rose.

"Bimodon," said Miss Fielding, "has won so many honors and so many beads in so short a time that I am doubly glad to read them now." She named one by one the girl's list of achievements and laid the beads in her hand, at which Edna's color rose and there was a wonderful glow of pride in her eyes. "As a Wood Gatherer," went on Miss Fielding, "you have endeavored to follow the law of the fire, you have brought the fagots to the fire. Have you now a further desire to repeat in the presence of the council?"

In a clear, sweet voice, Edna repeated the Fire Maker's Desire.

"In token of your ability and desire for service," said Miss Fielding gently, "I place on your left arm this bracelet to show to others that you have proven your worth to wear the watch-word of this organization and I appoint you to kindle the council fire at the ceremonial meeting to be held one moon hence."

"That will have to be at school," whispered Mabel regretfully, "won't it?"

Miss Fielding laid her hand gently on Edna's shoulder.

"Days back," she said, "when the moon was not quite such a happy moon for us all, you called this girl Bimodon, which means a grumbler. Let us drop that name with the memories that made it." Miss Fielding wrote the name upon a bit of birch-bark and dropped it in the fire.

"There!" she said with a sigh of relief, "it is gone forever. Who will give her a new name?"

"Let us call her — Wohsum-Naab," said Mabel, who prided herself upon Indian lore. "It means 'Shining Eyes' — and she looks it."

"Wohsum-Naab be it then!" said Miss Fielding and Edna did not say that the shining was tears!

"And now," said Miss Fielding, "there are so many, many honor beads in my hand for one that we all love, that I can scarcely hold them. All colors they are, and as I look at them I can only think of a smile that has helped me when everything else failed — of a shyness and sweetness that carried us all over many a rough spot. These beads are for a little girl who has grown up in spirit — a little girl who rode through a midnight

forest alone for all she was afraid — for a little girl who nursed her sister night and day — for a little girl we all love — Ida."

Flushing, Ida rose.

"No, no, Miss Fielding," she stammered, "they — they aren't all mine, truly. I didn't try for so many, I'm sure."

"Days back," said Miss Fielding, holding Ida's hand very tightly, "when I despaired of ever bringing my girls together, Ida's sunshine helped me more than I shall ever be able to tell and so to-night I am glad that Ida has fulfilled the requirements that make of her a Torch Bearer — and my assistant."

"A Torch Bearer," went on Miss Fielding, "as you all know, is a leader. She must be trustworthy and unselfish, a good team-worker and liked by every girl. I leave you all to say whether or not Ida fulfills those requirements."

"Yes! Yes! Yes!" came an excited chorus and every face reflected a generous glow of pride in Ida's honors.

"So," said Miss Fielding, kissing Ida impulsively, "I pass on to you, dear, my torch of leadership, so that in schooldays when I'm not with you,

you may keep the girls together until another summer comes." Again Miss Fielding wrote upon a bit of birch-bark. "Mousie, as you called her days back when she was a timid little girl of blushes and tears, is a name that must go forever too. Who will give her a new one?"

There was a hush and a general whispering. Then Ellen spoke.

"Miss Fielding," she said, her eyes very bright and gentle, "Mabel says there is an Indian word 'Wap-o,' meaning Sunbeam or Happiness. Let us call her that."

And so Sunbeam became the Torch Bearer of the Camp Fire Girls. And presently over the quiet lake, mantled in the silver of a summer moon, floated the strains of the Good Night Song.

"The sun is sinking in the west,
The evening shadows fall;
Across the silence of the lake,
We hear the loons' low call.
So let us, too, the silence keep,
And softly steal away
To rest and sleep until the morn
Brings forth another day."

P9-DLP-155